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'Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring out the false, ring in the true.'

Tennyson.

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CHIMES

FROM

HEAVEN'S BELFRY.

CHIMES

FROM

HEAVEN'S BELFRY.

BY

G. HUNT JACKSON,

AUTHOR OF 'THE WORLD-WIDE WANT.'

'Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound.'—PSALM lxxxix. 15.

'There are in this loud, stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting chime,
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet
Because their hearts some holy strain repeat.'—KEBLE.

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1870.

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Preface.

IT is with heavenly as with earthly sounds, various notes are required to constitute a full choral chime. No one truth can suffice to meet the diverse character of human wants, aspirations, and experiences. Hence God has graciously given to us His written word, from which, as from a belfry, we have heavenly voices mixing with the discordant sounds of earth; seeking by many commingling notes—soft and melting, loud and cheering—to awake the soul's dormant energies, to stimulate waning faith, to breathe inspiration into baffled hopes, and to gladden many an hour

of loneliness and gloom. The Bible is a sacred belfry, and all its accordant truths are heavenly chimes.

The careful reader will detect in these pages one note of frequent occurrence. Its repetition is intentional, and its sound indispensable to soul-music. It is the key-note of redemption awaking the responses of 'the whole family in heaven and earth.' That the Divine blessing may attend the varied notes contained in this volume is the devout wish and ardent prayer of the author.

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'Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring out the false, ring in the true.'

Tennyson.

Branches that Run Over the Wall.

GENESIS XLIX. 22.

Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: the archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

THE typical character of Joseph is eminently suggestive. He was the 'peculiar' son of his father. To him divine revelations, or 'visions,' were made. For communicating these revelations to his brethren he was hated—plotted against—sold. Subsequently he was exposed to severe temptations; was falsely accused and imprisoned. Afterwards, out of humiliation and suffering, he arose to royal eminence, and became the friend and saviour of his enemies.

In all this we see the foreshadowings of his divine antitype. Christ was the beloved of the Father. He was the divine exponent of wondrous truths. He became the enemy of His brethren because He told them the truth. Hence they laid plots to take away His life. 'The archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him.' During successive days and nights he was tempted of the devil. In the hour of His tribunal-trial 'false witnesses' were summoned to convict Him through lying lips. He was 'led from prison and from judgment' to the place of execution. Afterwards, through humiliation, and grief, and travail of soul, He arose from the dust of death to become 'a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins,' and to provide for a famishing world the bread of life. The corn of wheat was bruised and put into the ground by the hand of foes. And now He invites the cruel bruisers to gather around His banqueting-table, there to satisfy their soul-hunger; and to put forth their hands to the living bowl which from the bruised vine He has filled with the blood of grapes; converting what on the cross was a cup of gall, into the cup of blessing.

'*Joseph is a* BOUGH.' Life, through union, is implied. The bough, or branch, derives its life from the tree of which it is a part. The sap of the tree, rising and spreading, gives vitality to the branches and leaves. '*I am the vine, ye are the branches.*' Our spiritual relations are divinely 'begotten.' Nature's life is a

forfeited thing through sin. It is a condemned thing, unacknowledged by God. In ourselves we are 'carnal,' and 'sold.' So we are taught through an inspired apostle. But while God has seen an end of all human righteousness, He has brought in, through Christ, a divine and everlasting righteousness. In Him we are branches of the 'bough' that God 'has made strong for Himself.' Now let the soul utter its exultant boast—for here boasting is not excluded—'I live, yet *not I*, but Christ liveth in me.'

Something in the way of fruit may now be reasonably looked for.

'*Joseph is a* FRUITFUL BOUGH.' '*The branch cannot bear fruit of itself. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for severed from me ye can* DO *nothing.*' Israel was an empty vine because he brought forth 'fruit to himself.' And, apart from the divine life, it is the only thing we can '*do*' in the way of fruit-bearing, to develop *self*. The more we know of our own hearts, and of the history of the Church in all ages, the more do we know that just in proportion to the life and operations of self, is Christ's holy vineyard rendered barren in aspect, and wild grapes substituted for mellow fruit. The Divine Joseph was fruitful because He ever yielded fruit to God. He came to do not His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him. In Him the fruit was always full, and ripe, and heavy, and unreservedly laid on the table of

the Lord. It was fruit that shook like Lebanon. Here only was to be found unadulterated wine—'*the wine that cheereth God and man.*'

'*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.*' As the care, industry, and skill of the husbandman are reflected in the trees that hang heavily with ripe clusters, so does the great Father desire fruit that may abound to His glory. Watch, therefore, against everything that tends to rob God of fruit. Beware of all spoilers, of the locust, and caterpillar, and east wind; lest when the Husbandman cometh to seek fruit, He find 'leaves only,' no 'shewbread' for His table, no 'summer-fruit,' 'no cluster to eat.'

To secure this fruitfulness the further comparison of the text must be illustrated.

'Joseph is a fruitful bough, *a fruitful bough by a well.*' Here we are furnished with an expressive emblem of the influences of the Holy Spirit. Union with the Saviour plants the soul 'by a well'—'*a well of living water.*' The most stately and fruitful tree would soon lose its beauty and productiveness, if bereft of the supply of water. But 'through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant.' The Saviour was divinely fruitful because 'filled with the Spirit.' The world was 'a dry and thirsty land, where was no water;' but amidst the drought of earth He was supplied by perennial and heavenly springs. He could say, and that at all times—'*all my springs are in thee.*'

Thus was the patriarch Joseph made strong. '*His bow abode in strength.*' Take a withered bough and make a bow of it, and it will snap at the first tension. Out of Joseph's '*bough*' was made his '*bow,*' and it abode in strength because full of sap. 'The archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him.' He was assailed by the arrows of false brethren, and by the poisoned barb of strong temptation. But 'the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.' In one hand he held his bow of faith; in the other the arrow of vigilance winged with prayer; and thus became victor. His day's sunshine was born out of his night's darkness and sorrow; and the day was all the more fresh and beautiful because 'the *dew* lay all night on his branch.' He resembled Aaron's rod which the darkness made to bud, and blossom, and bear fruit. Hang heavy weights on rotten boughs, and they will snap. Joseph's bough was green and full of juice. He could bear without breaking a heavy pressure, both of sorrow and of joy. In adversity he was not in despair, and in prosperity not unduly elated.

O my soul, take up thy residence near this well of life—planted by God's own hand, and watered continually with the dew of heaven. Here thy branches shall spread, and thy beauty be as the olive tree, and the smell as Lebanon. Here let the joyous canticle be heard, '*Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.*'

'Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well, '*whose branches run over the wall.*' Here observe a threefold illustration.

Jesus is the Divine Bough whom the Father planted in the earth; 'the Plant of Renown.' Between the Creator and the creature sin had built a 'wall' strong and high. The tree has grown and filled the whole earth with its shadow and fruit. It is 'the tree of life for the healing of the nations.' Over the high wall of human guilt, to the uttermost ends of it, the blessed fruit of divine mercy and forgiveness reaches. We who were 'afar off' are made 'nigh.' Whosoever will may come, and extend the hand of faith, and pluck the living fruit, '*and eat and live for ever.*'

The spirit of sectarianism is a 'wall.' God has made Christians *one*. They make themselves many. Well, seeing that we are divided by denominational barriers, the best thing to be done is to let the fruit of Christ-like love grow over the wall. The Church is the garden of the Lord. We, and not God, have built divisions. Seeing they exist, and persist in existing, let us shed a large portion of the true Joseph-spirit all around us. Is it not possible to shake hands over the wall, and now and then throw over to our neighbour a few sweet flowers, or a handful of ripe fruit.

Everything in spirit, temper, and conduct, contrary to the spirit of Christ is a 'wall.' These walls are ever

meeting us, and obstructing the progress of our soul growth. Selfishness, pride, mutual animosities and alienations, are walls. In the hour of provocation the temptation is to say—'Well, we will keep to our own side of the wall, and let them keep to theirs.' No! let us move forward, and mount upward, and spread forth our branches, that they may run over the wall. Let some fruit of love fall into the garden of selfishness. Our neighbour may taste it, and if so it will be both sweet and medicinal. Let the celestial breath of peace mount over the partition, and be wafted to the adjacent soil. It will kill the canker-worm at the root of the trees. 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.' Give him to eat of the fruit of Joseph's bough, and drink of the well by which it grows.

When our branches thus expand and strengthen, they press very heavily against the obstruction, and soon it becomes 'a bowing wall, and a tottering fence.' Then follows the happy ruin, and the sweet angels of love and peace come and clear away the rubbish, and the two gardens become one; and henceforth are to be found in it only the fruits of the Spirit—'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness.'

Have we tried this experiment? We are standing aloof, it may be, in cold estrangement from some friend, or relative, or fellow-disciple. We are thinking that our fruit will never do them any good, and therefore we

are giving them none. Suppose we adopt the opposite course. We are the receivers of enmity only. Let us be the distributors of only love. We are getting only cold looks, cold hearts, and cold hands. Let us give in return nothing but cheerful looks, warm hearts, and earnest hands. If two cold things meet and mingle, the frost will make them one in the bands of death. But if the sunbeams of love fall on the things of ice the two opposites will blend in the union of that charity which 'endureth all things;' which 'suffereth long and is kind.' The frost-covered branches will yield to the genial influences, and quiver with a thousand pearls of liquid dew, while the ice-bound well shall be dissolved, the emancipated waters making glad music as they warble responsive to the chimes of heaven.

Lessons of the Night.

CANTICLES III. 1—4.

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

IGHT is a revealer of glory unrevealed by the day.

. . . . 'In her starry shade
Of dim and solitary loveliness,
We learn the language of another world.'

To the ear that is circumcised to hear all the divine voices of night there is a peculiar force and beauty in the declaration of the psalmist—'*The day is thine: the* NIGHT *also is thine.*' As if David had

said, 'The revelation of God's glory is an incomplete revelation without the revelations of night.' 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge.'

This midnight glory is revealed only to those who are *awake*. By night 'on our beds' we certainly cannot behold it. They who would be conversant with the beauties of the nocturnal heavens must be awake when the rest of their neighbours are asleep. The 'celestial fireworks,' or showers of stars, which a few months ago excited so much interest, were a revelation to those only who kept awake long enough to see them. To the multitude they were not sufficiently interesting to keep them out of their beds. Not a few retired early intending to 'rise' at midnight and behold them; but while they slept the glory appeared and vanished, and they rose 'by night' to seek what they could not find.

There is a moral as well as a material night. Sin has involved the soul of man in a dark and dreary eclipse. Night is the effect of motion. Were the earth to stand still at the point which makes our day, we should know of no night. Had man retained his position before the great Sun of his soul, and not gone from the light, the night of sin would not form so large a part of the history of our world. Ever since the melancholy hour when man 'went and hid himself from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden,' sin like a dark mantle has been overspreading the earth,

gathering blackness with its age; and, judging from appearances, it is fast attaining its midnight gloom. '*The night is far spent.*' The only relief we feel in the fact is that with the progress of the night is the advancement of the morning. When the night is far spent, the day is at hand.

Here, again, we are reminded of the words of the psalmist in their deep and spiritual signification: '*The night also is thine.*' The night of sin has evolved 'the glory of God' in a way which has filled heaven with adoring wonder, and will yet people it with adoring and grateful recipients of the light of divine love. The darkness of sin has revealed the attributes of God in a light to which angels and unfallen men must otherwise have remained strangers. Looking up from the sin and misery under which our world groans, we turn our eye to the serene moral heavens to behold the glory of God 'in the face of Jesus Christ.' As we gaze on moon and stars we think of their fair antitypes—the Church and its attendant glories, while we bless God for the beauty that relieves the night, and gives to all wakeful and watchful ones 'songs in the night-watches.'

Here, also, are glories *unseen* by many. There are eyes that see not the beauty, and ears that hear not the music of the spheres in the heavens of God's redemptive love. There are shut souls whose every moral sense is closed against the entrance of 'Grace and Truth.' Like a clear full moon, the word of God shines as the lamp of Truth; and like stars, messengers of mercy

and messages of Providence speak; but the light shines against closed windows and bolted doors; and the music floats by the sleeper, like sunshine and melody over the habitations of the dead.

Nor is this moral sleep wholly confined to the 'children of night.' The tendency of darkness is to put to sleep; and the effect of sin is likewise. The way to resist darkness is by the *use* of light. The word of God should be to the children of faith what the lamp is when the darkness of night advances, and spiritual life should be a sacred fire to make the knowledge of truth a heavenly flame, giving light to all that are in the house, and warding off the tendency to sleep. 'They that sleep sleep in the night,' and if our intercourse with the world's darkness be not relieved by heavenly light, we too, like the wise and foolish virgins in company, shall go to sleep.

Hence it is that the children of God are visited by *soul-darkness.* Sin is a separating power; like intercepting clouds, it breaks our fellowship with the light. Sin eclipses the divine sunlight. The sheep has wandered into the dark valley, and cannot say, '*Thou* art with me.' The child has gone from the father's home, and has lost confidence in the father's heart. Darkness, doubt, and despondency reign. The language of the soul is: 'My sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.' 'By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.'

From these words we may learn three lessons respecting *interrupted fellowship.*

1. *Sloth.* 'By night *on my bed.*' Too many Christians, by their slothfulness in spiritual things, are giving an affirmative answer to the question of our Lord when He asked, 'Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a *bed,* and not to be set on a candlestick?' They are doing with the lamp of their faith what the ten virgins did with theirs—making it a companion of their repose and indolence, saying in the language of Job, '*My bed shall comfort me.*' The consequence is soul-lassitude and spiritual despondency. The health of the body is affected injuriously by an undue measure of sleep, and its vigour impaired by the want of exercise. Slothfulness, both of body and soul, tendeth to the poverty of both. There are to be found persons utterly ignorant of the ordinary laws of health, who are ever expressing surprise at the delicacy and feebleness of their bodies, who fail to see that the simple and obvious reason is that they literally spend half their life in their beds, and the other half in doing nothing; and who seldom go out of their dwellings to feel the sun and breathe the air. A like astonishment takes hold of some Christians. They are never truly happy in the possession of divine peace. Like the ebbing and flowing sea, their souls are never at rest.

The way to remedy the evil is to lay aside sloth, and exchange indolence for activity: to 'arise, and *shine*'—to arise, and *work*—to arise, and give to the words of

Jesus, uttered to the man sick of the palsy, their highest significance, '*Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.*'

The man of health has no time to think about doctors and apothecaries. With blithe heart, firm step, steady hand, and sunshine written on his brow, his enjoyment of health is the best proof that he possesses it. It is even so in the kingdom of heaven. The busy Church is the peaceful Church that has no time for quarrelling. The active Christian is the happy Christian who never thinks about despondency. His love for his Master is seen and read of all men, and known to himself, by doing the Master's will. His zeal for God does not procure his salvation, but it is an evidence that he has it: it is the mirror that reveals a divine resemblance: in it a countenance glowing with holy peace is reflected; and he goes from it, singing as he goes—'*My beloved is white and ruddy; my beloved is mine, and I am his.*'

2. A second reason for interrupted fellowship is *world-fellowship*. 'I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.' The '*city*' was not the place to find the 'footsteps of the flock,' and 'the shepherds' tents.' The 'city,' with its 'streets and broad ways,' was not the place to hear His voice who a short time before was seen 'coming leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.' The 'mountain of myrrh, and the hill of frankincense'—verdant 'fields,' and quiet

'villages'—'orchards,' and 'pleasant fruits,' and 'the smell of Lebanon,' were surely not to be found by going about the 'city.' And the city '*by night*,' with its darkness and guilt, was certainly the most unlikely of all places for the successful seeking of Him whose memories of city-life are the memories of *tears;* who now, as of old, and 'by night' especially, might well behold the city and weep over it.

The crowded 'streets and broad ways' of a busy and fashionable world are not the places to have fellowship with One whose meek and lowly heart is the source of His rest, and the secret of the peace of all to whom He gives rest. How many, to whom the charge of inactivity in the Church could hardly be made, are repeating the conduct of this Bride—seeking fellowship with a world which has no sympathy with Him whom the soul loves! The consequence is dissatisfaction. The soul does not doubt its safety in Christ; but fellowship with His spirit is interrupted. The heart's love for Christ, it may be, is not questioned; but the love is being continually rebuked by want of practical loyalty to His claims, and obedience to His precepts.

Of the early disciples of the Saviour it was said, 'And they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.' This high compliment cannot be said, with the same certainty, of many modern disciples. The marks of the world are too clearly upon them. The signs of *city-life* are about them betraying their commerce with the 'streets and broad ways' thereof.

The wan and careworn aspect, and not the countenance 'white and ruddy,' declares plainly that, like Lot, in contrast with Abraham, their dwellings are not 'beside the shepherds' tents.'

By reason of world-fellowship 'there are many Christians who, all their life-long, carry their hope as a boy carries a bird's nest containing an unfledged bird that can scarcely peep, much less sing—a poor, fledgeless hope.' Their religion resembles an instrument out of tune, from which discord instead of harmony is evoked, ever uttering the doleful note: '*I sought him whom my soul loveth; I sought him, but I found him not.*'

3. *Divine fellowship is interrupted when we attach more importance to the ordinances, teachers, and rites of religion than to Christ Himself.* 'The watchmen that go about the city found me; to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?' No answer is stated as coming from them. Their silence is replete with wholesome significance. Teachers of sacred truth and religious ordinances may become to us precious means of spiritual strength and holy stimulus; but they cannot supply the place of a personal Christ. The scientific process whereby we become acquainted with the properties of a loaf of bread will not feed the body; nor can disease be removed by frequent visits to a medical establishment. The bread must be eaten; the medicine must be used, and personal visits be made to the phy-

sician himself. To know something *about* Christ—to see Him in type, symbol, and ritual—to hear Him discoursed of—these things, in themselves, can never meet and satisfy the claims of a soul in earnest search of Christ, whether it be the search of a believer for fuller fellowship, or the search of an anxious one for salvation. Not unfrequently, when these things have been allowed to take the place of the reality, have they been made of God to end in the verdict of the words given in the fifth chapter: 'The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the wall took away my veil from me.'*

And is it not well it should be so? Every true soul —although for a season the darkness may hover about it, and the mists of the world obscure its vision—must become, sooner or later, '*unveiled*,' reveal plainly its true character and relationship, and appear before 'the watchmen,' and 'the keepers of the walls,' before the Church and the world—that a spiritual religion—a religion of the heart, of the affections, will alone bring satisfaction.

The Saviour thus sought will surely be found. 'They that seek shall find,' and finding rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. 'It was but a little that I passed from *them*, but I found *him* whom my soul

* Every spiritual watchman must, in faithfulness, sometimes utter words to 'smite' and 'wound' the soul whose supreme thoughts fall short of a personal Christ.

loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.' Lost fellowship and joy are restored. Sloth is cast away, the world-spirit forsaken, confidence in aught but Christ renounced. The heart sings, '*He restoreth my soul.*' The soul is again brought into the hallowed associations of its early gladness and its 'first love.' *The 'mother's house!' The mother's 'chamber!'* The place where the eye first saw the light, and the ear first heard the voice of maternal solicitude and fond affection! The place where life was given, and nourished, and made joyous!

Such are the sacred and lively experiences of the soul restored to the 'blessedness that once it knew when first it found the Lord.' The summer of the soul returns: the night of weeping is succeeded by the morning of joy. 'The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.' The bride is now fair to look upon; and the language of the bridegroom is, 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.' '*Come away!*'—from sloth, from world-fellowship, from everything that hides from thee *myself!*

And soon the words shall receive their final and most glorious interpretation. When the 'shadows flee

away,' and 'the day breaks,' we shall hear the voice of our beloved saying, '*Arise, and come away.*' And with ready voice and glad spirit we shall obey the summons, and rise to meet our Lord. He will 'bring us into his banqueting-house, and his banner over us will be love.' We shall see the King in His beauty, and in His presence shall be for ever satisfied.

Oh! to be over yonder,
In that land of wonder,
Where the angel voices mingle, and the angel harpers ring;
To be free from pain and sorrow,
And the anxious dread to-morrow,
To rest in light and sunshine in the presence of the King.

Oh! to be over yonder,
The longing groweth stronger.
When I see the wild doves cleave the air on rapid wing,
I long for their fleet pinions,
To reach my Lord's dominions,
And rest my weary spirit in the presence of the King.

Oh! to be over yonder,
In that land of wonder,
Where life, and light, and sunshine beam fair on everything:
Where the day-beam is unshaded,
As pure as He who made it—
The land of cloudless sunshine, where Jesus is the King.

Unnaturalness.

PROVERBS XXVII. 8.

As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.

IN reverses divine arrangements. It is consequently the most unnatural thing in God's universe. We sometimes talk of 'natural depravity.' Would it not be more strictly correct to say *unnatural* depravity? All the physical, mental, and moral disorders of humanity; and all the material disorganization of the planet in which we live; are lamentable proofs of a state of unnaturalness. Wretchedness and want, suffering and tears, sickness and death, are not divine creations. All that the Creator ever made 'He saw that it was very good.' Sin is earth's exotic: the soul's nightshade: it has poisoned the soil of the tree of life; thrown a withering blight over creation's beauty; erased from the heart of man the portrait of Deity; 'turned the world upside down,' and thrust man out of his proper place.

The text teaches something about man in his wrong place, and man in his right place.

MAN IN HIS WRONG PLACE.

Man is here spoken of as a 'wanderer'—a wandering bird. Elsewhere he is represented as a wandering sheep, a wandering prodigal, a wandering star. As a lost bird, he has left the safety of the true ark. As a wayward sheep, he has forsaken the fold of the true Shepherd. As a prodigal child, he has gone from the Father's home into the far country. And as a 'wandering star,' he has departed from the great Central orbit of order, harmony, and repose; broken loose from law—the law of holy and blessed allegiance.

'*Where art thou?*' was the significant question of God to our first parent: intimating that he was not where he ought to have been, not where he once was. If ever Adam felt himself in an unnatural attitude, it was surely when, under the consciousness of guilt, and seeking to screen himself from the presence of his Maker, he was arrested by the startling interrogation, 'Where art thou?'

Sin had turned him out of his place.

As we behold the poor prodigal returning to his father, with ragged garb, and shattered frame, and trembling limbs, we can almost hear him uttering the murmurings of self-accusation—'Oh, how unnatural has my prodigality made me!' As we again see him, reinstated in his father's house, once more robed as a

son, blooming with health, and smiling with grateful joy,—have we not an additional and affecting proof of the power of sin to turn man out of his resting-place? This world is, indeed, the 'far country,' filled with restless wanderers, who must continue 'to be in want' till they return to Him from whom they have departed—the stay of all creation—where the sin-weary may lie down in '*quiet resting-places.*'

Observe several things respecting man's original state—the 'place' from which he has wandered.

It was a state of conscious divine approval. Conscience was at rest. 'Fear, which hath torment,' dwelt not in the breast of innocence. Rival claimants there were none: therefore 'Perfect love did cast out fear.' There being no truant affections, the scourge was not required. The soul was conscious of a joyful obedience to divine law: therefore the voice of an accusing monitor was never invoked. Shame had no burning blush for the cheek, for the crimson dye of sin was unknown. But when at length the deadly poison entered the soul, a violated law clothed conscience as an avenging judge, and changed the place which, at 'the cool of day,' was wont to be known amidst divine entertainments, into the dark and awful precincts of a Sinai. And in all ages, wherever guilt abides, the indictments of a broken law and the responses of a guilty conscience declare the condition of one who is, too unmistakably, in his *wrong place.*

Man's original state was a state of divine illumination. The creature enjoyed the high privilege of companionship with his Creator. He shared in daily celestial intercourse—knowing what it was to talk with God. By these periodical visitations his mind became the sublime receptacle of unclouded light. In company with Him who was 'The Truth,' the mind never became perplexed by the question 'What is Truth?'

The earth would lose both light and heat without the sun. Sin has both stained the conscience and darkened the understanding. Not satisfied to have God for a tutor, to teach divine wisdom, man condescended to acquire knowledge from the lips of the devil. Too soon did he discover, to his sorrow, that he had learnt the bitter lesson of 'the knowledge of *evil.*' Moral evil has been followed by mental imbecility and error. Man has forsaken the sun of his soul, and consequently lost both life and light. Hence the expressiveness of the words of the apostle in speaking of the boasted wisdom of those who were living 'without God.' He would have them know that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. Why? Because it is light without the sun: not even starlight: having no union with the great celestial luminaries; but 'of the earth, earthy'—mere taper-light. Does not this account for the absurd and wild theories that have, in all ages, been entertained in the minds of men, even of the most scientific and profound? 'Nothing is too absurd to be believed by a philosopher,' said Cicero. Philosophy united with

Truth must be philosophy united with the God of Truth—the love of wisdom united with the love of God. Let all who pride themselves in their knowledge, and exalt human reason, remember that without Christ, 'the Light of the world,' the light in them is darkness. They are wandering from the light—the darkness proving them to be in their *wrong place.*

Man's normal state was a state of divine sympathies. His supreme affections were centered in his Maker. Towards Him the emotions of the soul moved, like bright constellations around the sun. 'In him he lived, and moved, and had his being,' in the sublimest sense of the words. But a foul usurper soon invaded the fair domain. Into the sanctuary of the heart sin was allowed admission, transforming the noble temple into 'a den of thieves,' with 'Ichabod' as its dark inscription. Then commenced the downward course of human deterioration. Deprived of the genial and life-quickening influences of the Divine solar orb, the noblest sympathies of the soul became frozen into selfishness—'earthly, sensual, and devilish.'

Hence the grand fatal mistake which sin has introduced into the hearts of men is the vain and manifold attempts to meet the wants of the spiritual in the supplies of the material.

'Attempts how monstrous, and how surely vain!'

As reasonably might the student seek to feed a famished

body by the books on the shelves of his library, as the soul expect to satisfy its deep and spiritual wants 'without God.' God alone is adequate to meet divine capacities! The soil in which the roots of our spiritual being were made to grow is an export from heaven; and the 'rod out of the stem of Jesse' the guide by which our affections should climb upward: growing around this object the tendrils of the heart entwine themselves with a permanent and all-satisfying embrace. 'Oh, this great and mighty soul! Were it something less we might find what to do with it—charm it with the jingle of a golden toy, house it in a safe with ledgers and stocks, and take it about on journeys, to see and be seen! Anything would please it and bring it content. But it is the God-like soul, capable of rest in nothing but God; able to be filled and satisfied with nothing but His fulness and the confidence of His friendship.' How signally was the truth of all this illustrated in the melancholy experience of the world's great poet, 'that splendid genius,' who—

> 'Drank every cup of joy; heard every trump
> Of fame; drank early, deeply drank; drank draughts
> That common millions might have quench'd; then died
> Of thirst, because there was no more to drink.'

How like some gay bird of magnificent plumage, which, having wandered from its native clime to some bleak tempestuous shore, where, with the raven as its only associate, and the 'carnival of death' as its sole source of subsistence, lingers out a short existence, and pines

away amid the spoils of corruption and death! Too many there are who find the same path of death—who, shorn of their moral glory, transmit their names to posterity as so many proofs of the truth of the words of Solomon: '*As a bird wandereth from her nest, so is man that wandereth from his place.*'

MAN IN HIS RIGHT PLACE.

'Man is as his heart is.' The evils which have been enumerated arise from the moral derangement of the affections. Man's true and proper place is that of confidence before God. This is the attitude of angels. It was likewise the attitude of man before sin dispossessed him of his inheritance.

The gospel comes to *restore* this forfeited 'place' by restoring lost confidence. It does so by revealing God in such a way as to inspire confidence. We cannot have confidence in the presence of mere *power*, if we have any lurking suspicion that it is arrayed against us. The revelation of divine *holiness*, instead of securing confidence, will but terrify the guilty. The attribute of perfect *wisdom* is calculated to repel rather than attract those who are conscious of their 'secret sins' being set in the light thereof.

The secret of all fear is *sin*. Angels know no fear, because they are strangers to sin. Man originally had not 'the knowledge of sin,' and therefore feared not.

Apart from sin there is but one manifestation of the Divine moral character. Anger, wrath, displeasure,

judgment, and other kindred terms, are never applied to God, except in connection with sin. Take away sin, and you leave but one prevailing aspect of God's moral character: that one aspect is LOVE. 'God is love.'

The gospel is the revelation of Divine love doing two things—*putting away sin,* and bringing the sinner near to Himself! The Mount of Sinai shows us the character of God against sin. Calvary repeats the same lesson, with the brighter and more enduring revelation of how God and the sinner can meet 'face to face.' It is the place where confidence towards God is restored, and where God restores the light of His countenance. It is the soul's proper place—*the 'resting-place' of faith and love.*

My brother, haste to the great Redeemer! Sin has mortgaged thy rightful estates. But Christ waits to restore to thee thy forfeited inheritance, and reinstate thee in thy lost place. Arise, and put in thy claim; accept, and go free. Then let thy whole life be a living and perpetual psalm of praise to Him who has proclaimed the year of thy spiritual jubilee.

'Return, O wanderer, to thy home,
Thy Father calls for thee!
No longer now an exile roam,
In sin and misery:
Return! Return!

'Return, O wanderer, to thy home,
'Tis Jesus calls for thee;
The Spirit and the Bride say, Come:
O now for refuge flee.
Return! Return!

'Return, O wanderer, to thy home,
'Tis madness to delay;
There are no pardons in the tomb,
And brief is mercy's day.
Return! Return!'

The Stone of Stumbling.

MATTHEW XXI. 44.

And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

ID ye never read the Scriptures?' What a strange question to put to the 'scribes and Pharisees'—to those who had to do with the penmanship and teaching of Scripture. Of course they had read the Scriptures, and in their own judgment were more conversant with them than He who had asked so impertinent a question! Why, then, did they not understand them? Two great statements of Scripture were finding their fulfilment at this time. The 118th Psalm predicted the very terms of welcome which, in the hearing of these scribes and Pharisees, had just greeted Messiah's advent. Had they not heard the voice of the multitude saying, 'Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!' And did not the 22nd verse of the same psalm foretell the rejection

of the Messiah in these words—'The stone which the builders refused is become the head-stone of the corner.' The ninth verse of the Gospel of Matthew gives us the fulfilment of the first prophecy. The words of the text have to do with the second.

The sin of these scribes and Pharisees was the sin of rejecting one whose character and mission accorded most minutely with what was written of Him 'in the Scriptures.' In rejecting Him they testified to the truth of Scripture, and proclaimed themselves unbelievers in it. In the language of the apostle Peter, 'They stumbled at the *word*, being *disobedient*.'

The Saviour's contact with human perversity and unbelief was like the contact of light with the closed doors and bolted windows of a house. Open the doors, and throw wide the shutters, and the light will enter. 'When the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them,' and they 'sought to lay hands on him.' They saw the light advancing in its fulness, and felt its power, and shut it out. Not an angel from heaven, not even Christ Himself, according to His ordinary laws of dealing with men, can effect an entrance for the truth into the human soul when the heart is closed and bolted by prejudice and enmity. A preacher might as well attempt to get an audience with the dead of the church-yard as to lodge a truth into the soul of a hearer when the heart is shut, and the sentinel of a bitter animosity guards the gateway.

The first clause of the text has been fulfilling itself for eighteen hundred years, in the history of the Jews, to whom the words primarily refer. They 'stumbled' against Christ—were, and still are, 'offended' with Him. Nationally and morally they are 'broken'—'a scattered and peeled people.' They were made to be 'God's husbandry'—'God's building.' But when the king's son came to his 'vineyard,' they thrust him out. When the corner-stone was brought to them, instead of building on it, they kicked against it as the children of the night and of darkness, and wounded and lamed themselves.

The vineyard which they have dishonoured, and the stone which they have rejected, have been given to the Gentiles, according to the words of doom immediately preceding the text: '*Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*' So the apostle Paul applies the identical similitudes of the chapter before us to the Christian Church, saying—'*Ye are God's husbandry: ye are God's building.*'

In looking at the words of the text as having an application to ourselves, they suggest—

1. *The self-inflicting penalty of sin.* By stumbling against a stone we may lame ourselves, or tear our flesh, or put a bone out of joint. Like the demoniac dwelling among the tombs, cutting himself with stones, he who lives in sin makes choice of his own tormentor

Look at the contrasted characters and history of two persons, the one ruled by the laws of Christ and His gospel; the other, by the opposite laws of sin. The one has a healthy soul in a healthy body, his head anointed with the oil of joy, and his heart refreshed with the wine of a perennial peace. The other has a 'broken' spirit, the weary tenant of a broken and emaciated body; his head like a weeping willow, and his heart filled with the bitter distillations of the deadly upas. The one leans the whole weight of his soul on Christ, and is at rest, like a stone on its foundation. The other 'falls' against Him, and is broken and bruised as with the sharp projecting rocks of the caves of death. The religion of Jesus Christ is the religion of heavenly benedictions; it never did and never can inflict a curse. Opposition to it is fraught only with grief, breathes nothing but the adder's poison, and inflicts the sting of death. The wicked are their own enemies. They know not what they do. The laws of God they hate, and cast from them the cords and bands of mild and gracious prohibitions. But they hate 'without a cause,' and spurn the bonds of their security, turning a deaf ear to the interdiction of Love as it utters its commandment of life—'Do *thyself* no harm!'

The words of the text warn us against—

2. '*The offence of the cross.*' The cross of Christ, and 'foolishness,' have been regarded as synonymous terms with many in all ages, since the coming of Him

who introduced it into the world. And long before, even from the creation of man, the *spirit* of that cross was a 'stumblingstone.' The spirit of the cross is self-sacrifice—the negation of self. This was the condition which our first parents were told to observe in order to retain their righteousness. It was the condition that enabled Abel to offer unto God 'a more acceptable sacrifice than that of Cain.' Abel's was the expression of the sacrifice of *self*—the renunciation of everything about self as a ground of justification before God. Cain surrendered the fruits of the earth, but not himself. Under the portrait of Abel we read these words: 'He that *loseth* his life shall find it unto life eternal.' Under Cain's picture we read: 'He that *loveth* his life shall lose it.'

'It is recorded of Phidias, the old Greek sculptor, that he was employed by the Athenians, on one occasion, to make a statue of their goddess Diana. He succeeded in producing a statue of marvellous grace and beauty. It was the admiration of all beholders. He was so enamoured of his work, and so desirous that his name should go down to posterity, that he secretly engraved his own name upon one of the folds of the drapery. The Athenians discovered it, and indignantly banished the man who had thus polluted, in their estimation, the sanctity of their goddess.'

The tendency of the human heart is to repeat, in a spiritual sense, the vanity and pride of Phidias. How offensive to the eye of the infinite Father, and how dis-

honouring to the infinite efficaciousness of the Redeemer's finished and perfected sacrifice, is the attempt to claim any share, however small, in the honour of the soul's redemption. The great principle of salvation is that self is lost in Christ. This is the glory and the power of the cross, and should be *our* glory, our satisfaction, and our peace.

Observe the prominence given by the apostles to this central truth. Take an extract from Peter's sermon: 'This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.' Hear the words of Paul: 'As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed' (Rom. ix. 33). And again, in his Epistle to the Ephesians: 'Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone' (ii. 20). And again, from the words of the apostle Peter: 'To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious' (1 Pet. ii. 4).

The human heart is full of spiritual pride. This stone is therefore 'disallowed of men.' By the Unitarian and the Ritualist alike it is 'disallowed.' The one ignores it altogether as a foundation; the other builds on it, but mixes with the gold the 'wood, hay, and stubble' of ceremonial observances.

It is, nevertheless, the stone '*chosen of God, and*

precious.' And because it is thus characterized we see its true efficacy and glory. It is because God has chosen it that He has chosen us in it. Because Christ is 'precious,' we likewise are precious 'in Him.' The gold-digger willingly chooses the rough ore, and vile clay, that cleaves to every piece that contains the pure metal; and so he lays it up in his chest as a precious lump till the time of purifying. Paul takes up this thought, and says, 'If the first-fruit is holy the lump is holy.' And John, in other words, expresses the same truth: 'As he is so are we in this world.' Death will finally purge out the 'old leaven' of human imperfection; and in the resurrection soul and body shall be blended into a pure and new lump. '*Now* are we the sons of God.' *Then* we shall see Him as He is, and be like Him.

3. Meanwhile we are to strive after *practical* holiness. 'Every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure.' While the simple condition of salvation is union with Christ, the quickened and renewed soul is called to an unyielding and unremitting opposition to every form of evil. This opposition often creates 'stumbling.' Sin is *against* Christ—against His Spirit—against His word. Whenever we sin we 'stumble at the word, being *disobedient*.' The Spirit of Christ in the claims of His word, often 'offends' us. 'By the law is the knowledge of sin.' How many a precept of the gospel, by the light of which we get the knowledge of our disobedience, puts to us the ques-

tion asked by the Master of His first followers: 'Doth this offend you?' The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of truth, righteousness, love, gentleness, goodness, temperance, &c. Whenever we fail to bring forth 'the fruits of the Spirit,' we walk 'after the flesh,' and not 'after the Spirit.' Like the 'children of the night,' and not 'of the day,' we walk in darkness, and fall against the stone on which we ought to rest. 'If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.'

And the result of stumbling is wounding, and bruising, and crippling. Hence follows unfitness for service, *disqualification.* How can a broken branch bear fruit? How can a splintered, broken stone, 'a stone most precious,' be fit for setting in gold, for the king's use? How can a costly piece of marble, rent asunder by the stroke of lightning, be used by the builder for some prominent place of attractive beauty? How many precious stones of the Church have lost their lustre and become impaired by some lamentable 'fall,' or by a spirit and temper wholly contrary to the Spirit of Christ! The Divine hand would fashion them into forms of beauty, and polish them 'after the similitude of a palace,' and bring them into the various departments of His great temple of service, where are 'all manner of precious stones.' But how can He? How can the works of darkness commune with the chambers of light? How can He bring into 'concord' the fruits of the flesh and

those of the spirit? How can He put the spirit of self-will with the costly diamonds and precious pearls of Christ-like love? How can He put the spirit of irritable and restless discontent with the pure white 'sapphire' of serene peace? How can He put the spirit that is 'easily provoked' with the rich 'rubies' of long-suffering and gentleness? How can He take the dark spirits of 'anger, wrath, and malice,' and put them with the rare and radiant 'emeralds' of forbearance, meekness, and forgiveness?

How can He? God can make use of us only so far as our fitness renders us 'meet for the Master's use.' He cannot employ 'instruments of unrighteousness' for holy purposes. He cannot work with blunted tools when sharp ones are indispensable. He cannot place us among His brightly-burnished jewels if our spiritual natures are rough, angular, and shapeless. He cannot call us to run if we are lame; nor to soar, if our wings are clipped; nor to behold His visions, if blind; nor to hear His voice, if deaf; nor to fight, if our hands are paralyzed.

To be used we must be rendered practically 'partakers of the divine nature;' brought into the fellowship of the Spirit; vitalized and energized with the mind of Christ. We must be made perpetually subject to the magnetism of the Spirit—continually under the attractive power of the cross—ever 'coming as unto a living stone,' to Him from whom our life is derived, and by fellowship with whom alone it can be sustained.

Abiding thus in His presence, and drinking of His Spirit, we shall 'dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty,' securely lodged with Him of whom in the hour of His temptation the words were true: '*He shall bear thee up in his hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.*'

'Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: *but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*' This second part of the text is yet to receive its complete fulfilment. The stone has been caught up to heaven; but it is yet to fall in judgment on the wicked of the earth, and on all the finally impenitent. Then must the enemies of the Lord be 'broken in pieces, like a potter's vessel'—like Daniel's image, which, through 'the stone cut out without hands,' was made 'like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor.'

We must know Christ either as a Saviour or a Judge; either as the foundation of our immortality, or as the tempestuous wind which in the day of judgment will beat against a house whose only foundation is a foundation of sand. And great, indeed, will be the fall thereof.

Seeing the Unseen.

HEBREWS XI. 27.

For he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

THESE words are a portion of Paul's sublime eulogy on the character and life of Moses. I have selected them for the purpose of illustrating a bold contrast between the life of the patriarch and that of the Egyptians—between the visible and invisible as seen in the life of sense and the life of faith.

A contrast between the visible and invisible appears to be presented to us in the earliest infancy of Moses. Exposed, from the hour of his birth, to the double danger of Pharaoh's anger, and the possible vicissitudes attending his concealment, he was, pre-eminently, the object of an invisible care. They who feared 'the commandment of the king' and knew the instrumentalities of his 'wrath,' could see nothing but a terrible doom for the child. But the parents of the child were 'of the

house of Levi'—'of the household of faith;' and to the eye of faith the waters of the Nile and the 'ark of bulrushes' were as free from evil as were the children of the royal nursery. The eye of sense saw difficulty, danger, sorrow, and destruction, according to the character of outward circumstances: but in spite of the power of circumstances the language of faith was, 'I see a hand they cannot see: I hear a voice they cannot hear.'

Visibly, nothing but an ordinary and very common occurrence took place when Pharaoh's daughter went down to the river's bank; and yet an invisible hand was leading her there to carry out and unfold a prearranged plan. In the world's vocabulary we find the origin of chance and accident, but the spiritual should be familiar with another language. In the believer's history the finger of God should be seen tracing every line of his path, and making its presence and power felt in every event, the great and the small alike; all circumstances, even the most trivial, being the vibrations of Heaven's electric cable, the links of which are submerged beneath the dark waters of time and sense, but all fastened to the eternal throne.

'There is no circumstance, be it ever so commonplace, which may not be regarded as a messenger from God, if only the ear be circumcised to hear, and the mind spiritual to understand the message. If we lose sight of this, life, in many instances at least, will be but a dull monotony, presenting nothing beyond the most

ordinary circumstances of every-day life; on the other hand, if we could but remember, as we start each day on our course, that the hand of our Father can be traced in every scene; if we could see in the smallest, as well as in the most weighty circumstances, traces of the Divine presence, how full of deep interest would each day's history become!' Like Moses, we should be found '*enduring as seeing him who is invisible.*'

Again: attracted by the child's novel cradle, and touched by his plaintive cry, the princess became interested in the infant stranger; and as she looked upon the 'goodly child,' the fair countenance took possession of her heart, and she called for a nurse and said, 'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.'

That which chiefly interested the princess was an object of sense. The babe was 'fair to look upon,' and she wished to treasure the child as she would a precious flower, or costly jewel. But the one to whom the care of the treasure was committed could see the 'invisible,' and thanking Him whose hand had given her back the sacred gift, she said within herself, My royal mistress has said, 'Nurse this child for *me:*' my heart replies, Yes, I will nurse him for thee, for me, and for God.

Do we know what it is to bring the light of the invisible in which to view the visible?—to see the unseen in the seen—the supernatural in what we call natural—the Creator as indissolubly united with the creature?

Do we ever recognize in the laws of nature the laws of God? Do we feel, as we look upon flowers and fruits, that a Divine hand has touched them and made them lovely, and Divine benevolence breathed on them and made them fragrant and sweet? Above all, do we know and intensely feel, when our children cluster around us and look into our faces, that by their presence, more than by any other earthly object, are we brought into contact with the unseen: that we look upon a holy charge for the care of which God holds us more responsible than did Pharaoh's daughter the maternal nurse: that in the bright sparkle of the eye, and the merry prattle of the lips, and the dancing joy of the child's limbs, we see but the outward expression of a hidden life and destiny—the immortal part that has sprung from Him, and must return to '*him who is invisible.*'

We are furnished with an illustration of the text in the estimate which Moses entertained of the character of the Israelites as contrasted with that of the Egyptians. The children of Israel possessed a character, rank, and dignity, that were 'invisible' to the outward eye. They were of a right honourable caste—'of the stock of Israel.' In their veins circulated blood purer and nobler than the blood of all the Pharaohs. They were of the mint of heaven, and the seal and superscription imprinted by the Divine hand was 'Holiness unto the Lord.'

We can imagine how many a sneer would mark the disapprobation of the conduct of Pharaoh's daughter, and of the subsequent conduct of the king, when the Egyptian courtiers were made acquainted with the proposals of royalty respecting Moses: how some would take occasion to insinuate that the Israelite would be a perpetual blot on their fair national escutcheon.

How infinitely pitiable is the ignorance of men respecting spiritual character! The prodigal never imagined the extent of his folly until he 'came to himself.' No force of logic will persuade the poor lunatic that his brow is not adorned with a crown. The light of morning, or the shrill and startling call of the battle-cry, dissipates the illusion that the tented field of armies is not the soldier's happy home. And how many, to whom the name of Christian is as distasteful as was the name of Moses, or of an Israelite, will not unlearn their error until aroused by the brief sentence, divinely selected and divinely applied by Him, who, when he would characterize the folly of one who lived only for the seen and the temporal, expressed it in two words—'*Thou fool.*'

As spiritual Israelites let us never forget our character and rank, and high vocation. We are in the world, but not of it, as Moses while in Egypt was no Egyptian. Earth is not our native soil. The climate is ungenial; the atmosphere unhealthy with the smoke of the 'flesh pots.' Our companions are aliens, for we are in an enemy's land and passing through it to the inheritance

of our wealth, to the possession of our honour. We are 'born of God,' and 'our citizenship is in heaven.' We *are* Israelites, although the Egyptians will not acknowledge our rank. Let the high ambition of the soul be stirred to be Israelites 'in whom is no guile'—ever 'seeing Him,' and seeking to please Him '*who is invisible.*'

The closing hours of the life of Moses are a sublime commentary on the words of the text. While he was yet in the flesh, before he exchanged faith for sight, he saw as he had never before seen 'him who is invisible.' Separating himself from all that was earthly, he ascended the sacred Mount of Nebo, to talk with God 'face to face,' and to behold glories that to others were hidden. But flesh and blood could not long '*endure*' a vision so divine: so, taking a final glance at the land of Canaan, his overawed spirit gladly obeyed the summons to go up higher.

How blessed a type of what we call death! We see but the 'mortal paleness on the cheek,' not the 'glory' that takes possession of the soul. Death to a Christian is the Father's voice, saying, '*Ascend higher.*'

'Upward steals the life of man,
As the sunshine from the wall;
From the wall into the sky;
From the roof along the spire.
Ah! the souls of those that die
Are but sunbeams lifted higher.'

Strangely in keeping with the whole character and history of Moses are the last recorded words respecting his burial: 'And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.'

Knowing the natural tendencies of human nature to attach an undue importance, even in spiritual things, to the seen and the material, the Lord hid the grave of His eminent and honoured servant. Had the grave of Moses been known, the Israelites might have made it an idolatrous shrine, doing with it what they did with 'the brazen serpent' when they 'burned incense to it' (2 Kings xviii. 4). It was an object worthy of interest with 'Michael the archangel,' who 'disputed about the body of Moses,' to 'contend with the devil,' while he guarded the patriach's tomb from all idolatrous associations, shielding it as with a flaming sword, lest, like the forbidden 'tree of life,' it should yield only the fruits of death.

Let all who are giving undue interest to what in religion appeals only to the outward senses, take heed to the lesson of Hezekiah, who when he began to reign 'removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent: and he called it Nehushtan' (a piece of brass). He gave to it its proper name and true value—it was but 'a piece of brass,' a symbolic thing that *had* been of use, and was now useless; worse than useless to those whose religion consisted in the outward, and visible, and

ritualistical. The carnal and ceremonial will never make men spiritual: it is 'of the earth earthy,' hazardous to the life of faith. A spiritual religion—a religion of the heart—is the sole power that can sustain and strengthen the soul amidst the tribulations and vicissitudes of time, making us to '*endure as seeing him who is invisible.*'

The mysteries associated with the death and burial of Moses should inspire our faith in God amidst all that is 'invisible' to mortals. In nature, providence, and grace, we are ever confronting the *hidden* things of God. Mysteries encircle us on every hand. And must it not 'needs be' so, seeing that man in this world is but in a state of infancy? Development and education alone can clear the way to the understanding of much that is concealed to the superficial observer. Every letter of the alphabet is a mystery to the infant: every line of a foreign language a mystery to the school-boy who knows only English: more than half of his mother-tongue is mystery to the simple peasant; and much that is quite intelligible in the writings of men, rendered unintelligible by reason of the lack of mental or moral sympathy between the writer and the reader. It is so with the character and ways of God in His government of the world and of souls. The hand that is on the helm of the vessel is hidden behind the obscurities of the world's dark night. We see the 'clouds and darkness,' and hear the howlings of the winds, but see not the undis-

turbed serenity of His countenance, who 'plants His footsteps on the seas, and rides upon the storm.' What is now hidden will one day be revealed: the clouds will disperse: the tempest will be hushed: the winds will be allayed: and the 'morning of joy' succeed the 'night of weeping.'

Like Moses, let us '*endure as seeing him who is invisible.*' Amidst all that is now painfully perplexing in relation to the world's affairs, the mysteries of Divine truth, and the history of individual hearts, let us seek to have our perturbed spirits calmed by the words of the Great Pilot who is safely steering us through all rapids, and says, '*Be still and know that I am God.*'

'O lonely grave in Moab's land!
O dark Beth-peor's hill!
Speak to these curious hearts of ours,
And teach them to be still.
God hath His mysteries of grace,
Ways that we cannot tell;
He hides them deep, like the hidden sleep
Of him He loved so well.'

The Worm.

JOB XXV. 6.

Man a worm, and the son of man a worm.

NOTHING earthly can adequately set forth the heavenly. The things that belong to the science of heaven require the vocabulary of heaven to expound them. But man is 'of the earth earthy.' Hence the endless variety of illustrations which the material world affords of human character and history.

Moreover, human character has two sides—the dark and the bright, with a preponderance of darkness. But 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.' The pure, the ethereal, the beautiful, the grand and sublime in nature are those representations alone which can, even faintly, illustrate the Divine. We turn our eye to the serene heavens, the lofty mountains, the noble rivers, the majestic sea, in our attempts to find out descriptions of the Infinite; and at every step of our endeavours are made to feel the strong and stirring in-

terrogation: '*To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?*'

On the other hand there is nothing too low and grovelling, nothing too unclean and contemptible, which may not be employed to speak of some of the relationships in which, by reason of sin, man stands to God and to spiritual truth. How mean and repulsive a thing is a *worm!* yet is '*man a worm, and the son of man a worm.*'

Notwithstanding, as there are different kinds of worms, and qualities belonging to some which redeem them from loathsomeness; so may we find it possible, among other thoughts, to illustrate that which is ennobling in human relations by some of the properties and characteristics of worms.

1. With peculiar emphasis we may say of the worm —it is '*of the earth earthy.*' Springing out of it, boring into it, and feeding on it, or on that which grows upon it,—it is a singular image of man, who was formed out of the dust of the ground, and is destined to return to it; and who, alas! feeds on it. '*He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?*'

We read of the King of Nineveh sitting in ashes. What a spectacle! a king among ashes! More appalling still must it be to the eye of angels to see man, who was created in the image of God, and made to live in

God, grovelling in the earth like worms, and 'eating ashes like bread.'

All men may not be equally represented by that which belongs to the extremely gross in character. Like those more refined worms who live on the vegetation of the soil, on plants, fruits, and flowers, they may be lifted out of the strictly animal and sensual. Nevertheless, failing to find their life in God—gathering their pleasures from streams cut off from the great fountain of living waters—they are like the prodigal, feeding on that 'which the swine do eat.'

2. In the naturally repulsive character of a worm we have an illustration of *sin*. We instinctively shrink from the slimy touch of a filthy worm.

The only thing which repels God from man is sin. To man's weakness, ignorance, poverty, and sorrow, the Creator can and does graciously draw near; but from man's sin He recoils; it is that which His soul hateth, and which can never come near to Him except to be consumed by the fire of His holiness. Sin came near to Him at Sinai, and the mount burned with fire, with darkness and tempest. It came near to Him at Calvary, representatively, in the person of one who 'bore our sins in His own body on the tree;' and there was 'three hours' darkness.' In virtue of the work of Calvary God can now draw near to the sinner: it is the power that puts away sin, and brings into fellowship the soul and God.

What sin is to God it should be to us—a repulsive thing—that which we should hate and flee from; praying for an ever-increasing capacity to hate with a perfect hatred that which has called for so costly a sacrifice, and which has grieved the heart of Him who has loved us with so infinite a love.

'Oh, cursed, cursed sin! traitor to God,
And ruiner of man! Mother of Woe,
And Death, and Hell! wretched, yet seeking worse;
Polluted most, yet wallowing in the mire;
Most mad, yet drinking frenzy's giddy cup;
Depth ever deepening, darkness darkening still;
Folly for wisdom, guilt for innocence;
Anguish for rapture, and for hope despair;
Destroy'd, destroying; in tormenting, pain'd;
Unawed by wrath, by mercy unreclaim'd;
Thing most unsightly! most forlorn! most sad!'

3. The carrion-worm and canker-worm afford us an illustration of the *injurious* character of man as a sinner. 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain,' through the woeful havoc which has been made by sin and sinners. What are the ravages of war, with its power to turn the fruitful fields of golden corn into a battle-plain, but the dread results of human carrion-worms revelling in human blood?

What are the restless activities, passions, and pursuits of men, but the ceaseless gnawing of pride, envy, ambition, lust, anger, malice, deceit, and such-like things? —the canker-worms of the soul and carrion-worms of the body, whereby so many thousands and tens of

thousands secure their own ruin and the ruin of others; robbing themselves and their fellows of rest, strength, and comfort; and too often casting desolation around; despoiling beauty, blasting innocence, blighting hopes, withering and drying up all the fruits and sources of earthly joy, and preparing all that is mortal to be prematurely sundered from that which is not at all ready to enter on its immortal heritage.

The canker-worm has likewise found its way to the Church. The professed disciples of Christ are 'departing from the faith, giving heed to seducing doctrines and doctrines of devils.' What an importation of vile vermin has been introduced into the Church from the ranks of Popery, Puseyism, and Rationalism,—spoiling Christ's vineyard, and robbing it of beauty and fruit. These are moral 'locusts and caterpillars,'—a plague more disastrous than any of the plagues of Egypt! The hands that have been employed to gather the 'manna' of Divine truth have placed it in a forbidden place, and used it after a forbidden way, and the sin has been followed with the Divine judgment—the manna has been made to 'breed worms and to stink' (Ex. xvi. 20). By this sin, we fear, God is being provoked to anger, as was Moses through the sin of Israel.

There are likewise injurious and destructive elements that have to do with our soul-comfort—forbidden fellowships and indulged evils, which, like the little foxes that spoil the vine with tender grapes, are also like the 'worm' that destroyed Jonah's 'gourd.' How often

have the 'green pastures' been overcast with clouds, and the 'still waters' troubled and made turbulent, by the intrusive influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil—deleterious agencies that are the canker-worms of the soul! One worm may spoil the sweetest rose: one worm may corrupt the fairest fruit: one worm may injure the finest plant. So may one indulged sin exhale the fragrance of a Christian life, and take from it the rich bloom and fruitfulness of the beauties of holiness.

4. Learn a lesson of *humility* from the different classes and pursuits of worms. Some are great, and some small; some attractive, and some unsightly; some loving to climb, and others to wallow in the mire; some feeding on sweet fruits, and others on filth; some feasting at the roots of trees, and others at the top of the branches; some hiding in lurking-places, and others walking on the footpath: but both alike exposed to danger—the one to the step of the traveller, and the other to the axe or spade of the husbandman.

Such are human worms. Among them are the great and the small; the noble and the ignoble; the learned and the rude; the rich and the poor; the bond and the free; the slave and his master; some in pursuit of carnal and gross pleasures, and others of what is intellectual and refined; some basking in the sunshine of gladness, and others overwhelmed amidst storms of sorrow; some lifted up in power and authority, and others lying in abject meanness at their feet. But all are

worms! the difference being more seeming than real—like the *glow-worm*, professing and appearing to be something better than a worm, but only a worm; teaching all who are the children of night and darkness, that the light makes manifest that 'things are not what they seem.' And all are alike exposed to the manifold evils which flesh is heir to; and by the hand of death, that knows no respect of persons, must meet in the house appointed for all living; where worms find their common level, and recognize their common family relationship, 'saying to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister.' Thus do men pass away 'cleaving to things themselves which pass away, like leaves on waves,' like worms on leaves.

5. Hear one more discourse preached by the worm. Worms are not without their use in the world, and some are of great value. Such is the *silk-worm*, by whose skill and industry the world is furnished with precious and costly clothing.

A Christian should be both a glow-worm and a silk-worm, glowing with divine life and love, and using the material of love as so much precious silk to be put into the loom of life, and woven after a heavenly pattern, 'spending and being spent for Christ.'

They who understand the art of weaving know that it requires no small care, and watchfulness, to do the work well. A pattern is placed into the loom, and according to the absence of flaws is the perfection of the

work. For every broken thread there will be a flaw; and though the loom may go on working, and the workman continue his weaving heedless or forgetful of breakages; the flaws and defects will be revealed when the loom stops, and the work is done, and the weaver is summoned to give an account of his labour. So will it be with the Christian's *life-work*. According to the quality of the work will be the reward when it meets the inspection of the Master's eye, and receives his verdict. To the faithful painstaking servant the words of commendation will be heard, '*Well done!*' while respecting many an indolent servant, whose service of sacred spinning has been trifling, and badly done, the verdict will be uttered, 'They have woven the spider's web: their webs shall not become garments:' they shall 'suffer loss,' but shall 'be saved,' 'yet so as by fire.'

What are we doing with the loom of time, and warp and woof of life? Will the results of our handicraft go to adorn the palace of the Great King, to have a place among the treasures of heaven's exhibition; or shall they resemble the foolish 'labour in vain,' of which the spider's web instructs us—work destined to be swept away by the besom of destruction?

6. The bright and soaring butterfly, springing from the grovelling caterpillar, leaves the dirt and dust of earth, and takes wings to mount aloft, basking in the sunshine and feasting among the flowers.

Have we not here 'an emblem of our own resurrec-

tion, an emblem of the bright and better land?' We die to live. Death is but the portal of life. It is the dark tunnel which sin has built; but it conducts to 'the city of the Great King.' Above it is the golden pavement of heaven, and over it the shining ranks of angels and redeemed men do continually walk, their songs rising into richer measures, and their joys swelling into deeper and fuller ecstasies by the assurance that the dark terminus of sin and death is under their feet, bridged over by the everlasting foundations of 'life and immortality.'

Thanks be unto the gospel for shedding its bright light on this truth—for bringing to light 'life and immortality,' for enabling us to say, even in the prospect of death, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the last day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.'

Thus, after the similitude of the worm, 'this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality. Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.'

Made Straight.

LUKE XIII. 11—13.

And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

MAN'S rest-day is Christ's work-day. The Jews objected to this. They knew not the nature either of the Sabbath, or of the Lord of the Sabbath. Prior to sin the Creator observed a day on which He rested from His Creation-work—a rest which was typical of a higher rest. God made man and rested, and had man rested in God as his chief good, as God rested in him as His chief work, man's Sabbath would have been co-extended with the world's history. But man began to work after a forbidden manner, to do his work, his 'strange work' of sin; and by so doing he broke both his own Sabbath

and God's. Man's rest in God, and God's rest in man, has ever since been disturbed. Through all subsequent ages the creature and the Creator have been working—the one in sin; the other in judging it, and making provision for putting it away.

The Jews accused the Saviour of breaking their Sabbath. Might He not have charged them with breaking His Sabbath? But for them and such as they He had remained 'in the bosom of the Father,' in the perpetual enjoyment of heaven's unbroken calm. But love had brought Him down into the midst of sin; and in the midst of sin He could find no rest. His Sabbath would begin with the utterance of the words—'It is finished.' Meanwhile He must work, in seeking to give rest both to the souls and bodies of men.

Hence we find Him dealing with some of the bodily consequences of sin. He meets in the synagogue a poor woman 'which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.'

The incident is illustrative of human sin; human weakness; and human sorrow, in its relation to unbelief.

HUMAN SIN.

Sin has made the world a great infirmary—an hos-

pital of sick, palsied, and withered souls. God made man 'upright.' Sin has made God's work crooked. Man was made erect, with his brow facing heaven, conformed to a divine standard, with a moral nature reaching after the stature of a 'perfect man.' Sin has bent, and doubled, and 'bowed together' the whole being. Measured now by the measuring-line of a perfect law, and by the gauge of a divine righteousness, how clearly manifest does the spirit's 'infirmity' become! And the more that human effort tries to attain to the essential requirements, the more loudly do the voices of Sinai read out the verdict to every self-righteous soul, and assure it that it must always '*come short*' of the glory of God.

Hence, what this woman was physically man is morally—'in no wise able to lift himself up.' Like her, and like the 'withered man' at the 'pool of Bethesda,' the soul's uplifting is dependent on a superhuman power. Thus the simplicity of the gospel is illustrated. We put ourselves before the law, and try to keep it; and the result is either miserable failure, or miserable ignorance of our relation to the law. Man's relation to the law is the relation of a crooked stick to a straight one. 'By the law is the knowledge of sin.' It is the straight line that shows us how crooked we are. The self-righteous man is leaning the whole weight of his soul against a tottering wall. He is carrying a fragile reed for a staff, and will find, before he gets far on in his journey, that he is walking a joyless path—the very

'shadow of death;' and without the only thing that can comfort—the rod and staff of the good Shepherd.

'The law is made for a righteous man.' One man only has ever appeared in the world to keep it fully. He has 'obeyed the law, and made it honourable.' He came and put Himself side by side with the law, and measured Himself by it. The Father looked down from heaven, and was 'well-pleased,' and said, 'This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.' And what is the call which He issues? Even the same that greeted the ear of this afflicted woman. And whenever we repeat her obedience, He repeats the assurance given to her—'*Thou art loosed from thine infirmity.*' The Son makes us free, and we are free indeed. Weighed and measured by ourselves we are found wanting; but weighed and measured with Jesus we are '*made straight, and glorify God.*'

HUMAN WEAKNESS.

We stand in a second relation to the law. The obedience of Christ made the law 'honourable.' And in so doing we can honour Christ—in making His example our law—only by indirectly making the law, more or less, the rule of our life. Exemption from the dominion of the law does not free us from the obligations of practical holiness. Our 'liberty' is not to be used 'for an occasion to the flesh.' 'Being then made free from sin ye became the *servants* of righteousness.'

And here we are very sensibly reminded of our

weakness as the 'servants of righteousness.' While 'made *free* from sin,' in a legal sense, we are too often brought into the bondage of soul-slavery, 'through the lusts of the flesh and of the mind.' The unregenerate are not the only ones whom Satan 'binds.' Habits are binding, and evil habits are from Satan. They are his chains. And these chains are frequently found around the soul-limbs of the Lord's freemen. How many of the apostolic admonitions imply this! We are enjoined to walk in the Spirit, and not in the flesh; not to let sin have 'dominion' over us; not to let it 'reign' in our 'mortal body.' Many Christians are too often found repeating those forms of sin which in others are referred to as evidences of their alienation and estrangement from God. Such 'oft infirmities' are the blemishes on God's jewels—spots on God's stars—flaws in God's crystals—stains on the dress of God's fair children—and corruption on the fruit of God's vineyard. How rarely do we see a Christian who is not 'bound' to one or more of the manifold and varied forms of evil! Some 'easily besetting sin' enslaves and deprives of joy, and extorts from the spirit the cry—'*I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long.*' The eagle would mount aloft, but it is chained. The bird would soar and sing, but is encaged. The balloon would ascend, but it is tethered. The plant would put forth its shoot, but a stone is upon it. The ship would sail smoothly, but the sea is rough, the tide is against it, and the winds are 'contrary.'

'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.'

These are 'the things which concern our infirmities.' We pray that we may walk in the Spirit, and yet we live in the flesh; that we may be humble, like Christ, and yet are proud; that we may be lowly, and yet are vain; that we may be meek, and yet are petulant; that we may be gentle, and yet are 'froward;' that we may be forbearing, and yet are 'easily provoked;' that we may be forgiving, and yet are resentful and implacable. We admire the benevolent and the generous, and yet are avaricious. We would be charitable and speak no evil, and yet often find ourselves both speaking evil of others, and listening to it. We would, like Peter in the days of his infirmity, grasp a sword to fight for Christ, and yet afraid to confess Him before men. We would be adorned with all the beautiful graces of the Spirit, yet seldom display any before the world. We would 'lift ourselves up' to the standard of Christ, and be 'perfect even as our Father who is in heaven is perfect;' but behold, we are ever submitting to be 'bound' by the cold and paralyzing touch of Satan, under whose strong grasp we find ourselves 'bowed together, and in no wise able to lift ourselves up.'

Hence our help must be from the same almighty source from which the subject of the text found her strength. There is a living and all-present Spirit to help us. '*The Spirit helpeth our infirmities.*' When we are

weak, in Him we are strong. Do we 'suffer lack?' Let us 'ask of him who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not.' What we cannot do the Spirit of Christ can do for us. In Him the weakest may become 'as David, and David as the angel of the Lord.' Let us wait, therefore, upon the Lord. Whatever are our 'infirmities,' let us honestly confess them, and bring them to Him who 'healeth all our diseases.' 'They that wait upon the Lord shall *renew* their strength.' Quickened and refreshed by a constant waiting on the ever-present and living Spirit of God, we shall be 'lifted up,' and be made to hear the emancipating words—'*Thou art loosed from thine infirmities.*'

HUMAN SORROW AND UNBELIEF.

Unbelief in seasons of sorrow is one of the most prevalent forms of soul-infirmity. It is, by way of pre-eminence, 'the sin that doth so easily beset us.' It was that which so troubled the Israelites in their journeyings, and weakened them before their enemies. Like the disciples of Christ, long centuries after, and like Christians, long centuries after the disciples, they were 'slow of heart' to believe all the Divine words. It is the way of God to *try* the faith of His children. But faith can be tried only by the hidings of God. The child does not walk by faith when the majestic form and voice of the father are seen and heard. It is the walk of sight, like that of angels; not of faith, like that of men. Let the father hide himself, and then the child's faith will be

called out. It is an easy thing to believe that God will feed, clothe, and care for us, when the loaf is on the table, and the clothes are in the wardrobe, and health is glowing with strength. '*Faith is the evidence of things not seen!*' Faith believes in daylight when all is midnight gloom. It sees an invisible sun shining in another hemisphere, travelling towards this, and says to it—'The *night* also is thine, and the *day* also is mine.' Faith 'sees Him who is invisible.' When God was seen and heard at Sinai, His word was believed with power, so much so that the souls of the Israelites 'trembled.' But when sight gave place to faith, faith gave way to unbelief and murmuring. When Jesus was seen and heard in personal contact with His disciples, He commanded their unreserved and warmest confidence. When He left them they began to question, and to doubt, and had to hear the rebuke—'*O fools, and slow of heart to believe!*' Our faith, like that of the disciples under similar trial, is weak. It is a sickly thing. It loves the hospital. Whenever the Divine physician hides Himself awhile, instead of the soul 'waiting patiently for Him,' it retires to its invalid home, and there submits to all kinds of treatment at the hands of cruel expedients; and there would it remain a life-long patient, did not the good Physician come to claim and release His own.

The psalmist David, now and then, it would appear, found himself an indoor patient of this dark and sickly infirmary. In Psalm lxxvii. we have the record of a

very melancholy dirge which he sang on one of these occasions. Listen to it:—'*Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious?*' And then, suddenly 'calling to remembrance' the faithfulness of God in the *past*, he adds—'*This is my* INFIRMITY: *but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember the wonders of old. . . . . Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary.*'

He suddenly exchanges the infirmary for the 'sanctuary'—the place of weeping, and pain, and 'night-watches,' for the place of thanksgiving, of joy, and of hallowed communings. He is brought into the place of strength to 'meditate' on the 'wonders of old,' and to sing, '*Who is so great a God as our God?*'

In a more literal sense it was so with the woman whom Jesus healed. She was in the 'sanctuary' when she heard the word of her deliverance which freed her from her long 'infirmity.' When absent from the 'sanctuary' we can easily imagine how her mind would naturally dwell on her affliction, tempting her to murmur at her sad lot; whilst in the House of God she would be reminded of how light was her affliction when compared with the coming glory of her people Israel.

Let us ofttimes frequent, yea, let us take up our residence in the Sanctuary of Faith. In this 'sanc-

tuary' we shall grow 'strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.' Here no bands, though woven by Philistine hands, can bind the limbs of the Samsons of Faith. Here the sunshine is perpetual. When all earthly lights are extinguished the altar-lights of the Temple burn brightly, and that continually, while songs of sacred joy break the silence and beguile the lone hours of midnight watchings.

Our thoughts turn to the day when the words of the text shall receive their largest and most complete fulfilment—'when the dead in Christ shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth.' He shall draw near the graves of his sleeping saints—'that He may awake them out of sleep.' Here He shall unbind the prey of the mighty, while to His attendant angels He shall utter the imperial command—'*Loose them and let them go.*' And, lo! the scattered dust of generations and of long ages shall 'in the twinkling of an eye' become instinct with life, and be moulded into resplendent forms of immortal beauty. And these whom Satan through Death hath bound, some of them six thousand years, shall be redeemed from the power of the grave, and be *for ever loosed from all infirmities.*

'Ephphatha!'

MARK VII. 31—37.

And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; and were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

A FINE definition, in two or three words, of the character and earthly history of Christ, is contained in these concluding words—'*He hath done all things well.*' He was invested with power and authority to do 'all things;' and He did all things 'well.' No force, no united forces, material or moral, animate or

inanimate, ever challenged the supremacy of His will, and the might of His right hand—save the solitary circumstances of man's unbelief and obdurate heart. Over all other opposing elements His will, and the words of His lips, prevailed triumphantly. He spake, and the tempest ceased its roarings. He looked into the face of water, and it blushed into wine. The grave heard His voice, and yielded up its dead. His hand touched the diseased, and the leper was clean. The blind saw; the deaf heard; the dumb spake; the lame leaped for joy.

And all He did was 'well' done. Perfection stamped every word and act. He never uttered an incomplete sentence; nor performed a work but partially. Did He discourse to the people? their verdict was—'Never man spake like this man.' Did He curb the boisterous sea? He made it 'calm.' Did He turn water into wine? it was 'the best wine.' Did He raise the dead? He restored the full bloom and vigour of life. Did He heal the sick and the dying? He left no further need of the physician. Did He cure the leper? He was made 'whole' before the priest pronounced him such. Did He open blind eyes—unstop deaf ears—loose the tied-tongue of the dumb? The people 'were beyond measure astonished, saying—*He hath done all things well*: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.'

Have we not here a type of the Redeemer's grand work to which everything else referred? He did the work of salvation so perfectly, that nothing can be

allowed to supplement it: nothing may be added, nor anything subtracted. Its absolute perfection was announced with His dying breath, when on the cross He cried—'*It is finished!*' The work was '*well done,*' and the Father was '*well pleased.*'

The physical condition of the man here healed by Christ is highly instructive. He was '*deaf, and had an impediment in his speech.*' The incident instructs us respecting the moral condition of the world.

Sin has closed the ear of man against all divine harmonies. Like the idol gods described by the psalmist, men 'have ears but hear not.' Hence the significant reproof implied in the Saviour's words—'He that *hath* an ear, let him hear,'—intimating that some have no ear for truth, and for God. A voice that makes no impression on the mind or heart might as well fall on the drumless ear of the deaf. And for any benefit which spiritual truth produces, in many instances, every teacher of religion might as well come under the description given to some of the false prophets of old, who were as useless as 'dumb dogs that cannot bark.' There are melancholy multitudes that never hear God speak to them in anything. The many minstrels of nature make no glad music in their souls. The grand oratorio of the 'heavens' declares not 'the glory of God' to them. For them the oft-repeated voices of providence carry no messages, either of consolation or of warning. To all Babel-sounds, and confused noises

of time, and discordant notes of carnal mirth, the ear is keenly sensitive; but to all divine voices, and lessons from the unseen and immortal, they are stolidly insensible—'like the deaf adder that stops her ears.'

There is a large class of persons who suffer, in a spiritual sense, from *partial deafness.* Divine voices are heard, but very imperfectly—reaching not the interior region of the soul—entering at the door of one ear and departing from the other, almost simultaneously—heard, but soon forgotten—felt for a very brief season, and then allowed to die away amidst the tumultuous voices of the outside throng. Strains of holy and blessed music are heard now and then floating with soul-subduing power from above; but the heart is only half-awake and the ear but half-open; and so, after 'a little more sleep, and a little more slumber, and a little more folding of the hands to sleep,' all remembrances of the celestial chimes pass away with the dreams of night. Such are the 'way-side' hearers, who 'when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown.'

A third class, whose hearing is morally deranged, are those who have '*itching ears*'—whose ears are wide-open to some things, but tightly closed to others—eagerly listening to voices that are pleasant and somniferous, that startle not nor disturb the conscience; that make not the heart hear the hollow echoes of its emptiness and poverty; that appeal only to the imagination, the reason, the outward senses; that raise no con-

flicting forces of the spirit, nor issue divine prohibitions against long-cherished forms of sin. Such are they who say—'Prophesy unto us smooth things'—who resemble the awe-struck and terrified Israelites who 'could not endure' the 'voice of words' that rolled down Sinai's dread summit; and who 'entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more.' To this class of hearers the apostle Paul referred, when, writing to Timothy, he said—'Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine; for the time will come when they will not *endure* sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having *itching ears;* and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables!'

Observe, moreover, the derangement in the faculty of speech which belonged to this man. He had '*an impediment in his speech.*' The gift of speech is unspeakably precious. Blindness shuts us out from converse with nature; dumbness from converse with nearest kindred and dearest friends. Speech is often the safety-valve of the heart's emotions, without which the heart would break. It is possible for thoughts and feelings to grow so big as to produce, at times, an overwhelming and crushing pressure, the only outlet of which is speech or tears.

Some things there are which the tongue cannot do until, like this deaf and dumb man, we are brought into contact with Christ.

Contact with Christ is essential to the capacity for *prayer*. I speak not of the capacity of intellect or vocal utterance. A child may be taught to pronounce most correctly a whole string of Latin sentences, without possessing the ability to render into English a single word. Even a parrot may acquire the faculty of repeating the most sacred formularies.

Multitudes in heathendom and christendom—among churchmen and dissenters alike—are substituting the form for the spirit of devotion. It would be well for both those who use and those who denounce the use of mere forms of worship, to ask themselves the simple question—'What *is* prayer?' And finding that it consists neither in extemporaneous nor in written words exclusively, they might save themselves from the false confidence of presuming that they were the subjects of true worship because they either said or read prayers. Prayer is the heart's confession to God of what we *are*, coupled with heart-felt requests for what we *want*. Accepting this definition, it is self-evident that every one living without faith in Christ cannot offer true prayer. The heart does not feel the bitterness of sin, nor want the blessing of salvation. Through unbelief there is '*an impediment in the speech.*'

The same principle teaches the incapability of all who are destitute of spiritual life, of rendering the tribute of *praise*. Praise is the offspring of prayer, so far as salvation is concerned. It is the expression of the heart's thankfulness to the Divine Giver 'for his

unspeakable gift.' It is the manifestation of affection and loyalty to the greatest and best of all beings. It is the sacred incense of devout love. It must, therefore, be kindled on the altar of the heart in order to ascend to heaven as the 'odour of a sweet smell, acceptable unto God.' The gift must be received before the returning of thanks. Obedience must be rendered before love and loyalty can be manifest. Until these conditions be established, must not every voice that is lifted up in the attempt to praise utter strangely discordant notes in the ear of heaven? There is '*an impediment in the speech.*'

Apply this principle, also, to the *social* utility of the tongue. 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth doth speak.' Man is, as a speaker, what his heart is. The heart is the mint where the coin of speech is shaped in the image of truth, and stamped with the superscription of grace; or born out of darkness, and sealed with the stamp of a lie. Men are the only creatures in the wide world who are tongue-tied by sin. According to the poetic license of him who saw 'tongues in trees' and read 'books in the running brooks,' and heard 'sermons in stones,'—it may be affirmed that the whole of inanimate nature, in concert with 'beasts, birds, and creeping things,' have the strings of their tongues loose, while in fulfilling the end of their existence they proclaim—either in the majesty of silence or in audible sounds—their great Creator's praise. Man alone is dumb! He is sorely afflicted with '*an impediment in his speech.*'

Turn now to behold the power of the Great Healer in restoring the hearing and speech of the afflicted one. He came in contact with the Son of God, and consequently with the healing virtue of His presence, which like a stream of life flowed for the healing and refreshment of all who erected not against it the embankment of unbelief. Contact with the Saviour brings light and life to darkness and death, and says to closed eyes, closed ears, closed lips, and closed hearts,—'EPHPHATHA —*be opened!*'

The significant signs which accompanied this act of healing are worthy of particular notice. The Saviour '*put His fingers into his ears*, and *spat and touched his tongue.*' Though the act of touch, in itself, could carry with it no vitality, it may be regarded, doubtless, as symbolic of some great truth or truths. Probably it was designed to teach the man that henceforth his ears and his tongue were to be sanctified by a spiritual circumcision. A similar act was performed, as a divinely-instituted rite, with Aaron and his sons, at their consecration by the hand of Moses, who touched their right ears, and right hands, and right feet, with the blood of the sacrificed ram. We read, also, of similar acts performed, through angelic agency, in the history of Isaiah and of Daniel. The former prophet tells us that in his heavenly 'vision' a seraph flew to him with 'a live coal from off the altar,' and laid it to his mouth, saying—'Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine

iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.' The prophet Daniel likewise beheld in a vision 'one like the similitude of the sons of men' who 'touched his lips;' whereupon his mouth was open, and he spake.

We may suppose the Saviour to have addressed the healed man thus: I have put my fingers into your ears to teach you that while others are turning a deaf ear to my instructions, your ear is to be ever 'inclined' to receive them; for only in so doing will you avert a more serious deafness. I have also touched your tongue with what has come out of my mouth, that you may 'know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,' —and that you may learn so to regulate your life by my words as to be able to rejoice in sympathy with the psalmist—'*By the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.*'

It is impossible fully to enter into the profound depths of the '*sigh*' which Jesus uttered on this occasion. We may learn from it, at least, three things.

It teaches us that words are not absolutely indispensable to the offering of prayer. This sigh doubtless contained a prayer, for in all things the Redeemer acknowledged the Father, saying—'I can of mine own self do nothing.' The sigh of Jesus, like some of the mightiest forces of nature that are silent, was charged with the power of God. Some of the sincerest, deepest, and most agonizing supplications that have ascended to the

ear of God, have gone up with no more audible sound than that of a 'sigh.'

> 'Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
> The falling of a tear.'

The prayer of Hannah was mistaken for drunkenness. Drunken she was, 'but not with wine.' She was 'filled with the Spirit,' and the burden of the Spirit was too strong for weak words to find an exit through the lips. In Gethsemane the Redeemer spake few words, but 'being in an agony' He uttered a prayer without words in the language of blood.

The 'sigh' of Jesus should remind us of the price of our salvation. Our blessings, like those of hearing and speech that came to this healed man, are the purchase of a 'sigh.' The woes of Jesus were the birth-place of our joys. He 'wept' that we might smile. He 'sighed' that we might sing. 'The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.'

May we not find just cause for the 'sigh' when we remember the *responsibilities* which the man was about to assume in possessing what he had been so long deprived of—hearing and speech? The sin of refusing to hear the words of Christ most certainly was not his; nor the guilt of abusing that 'little member' which the apostle describes as 'a world of iniquity'—a tongue 'set on fire of hell.' It was sufficient to call forth a

sigh when Jesus reflected on the sins of the 'ear' and of the 'tongue' which might yet be contracted in the future of the man's history.

The parent's greatest joy, when looking on the fair form of the young infant, arises from the knowledge that God has graciously bestowed the blessings of sight, hearing, and speech. How often would a deep 'sigh' mingle with the notes of gladness, did the parent but know the blasting and withering effects yet to be wrought upon the child, by sights, sounds, and words—by eyes, ears, and tongues!

Christ or Ritualism?

LUKE v. 36—39.

No man putteth a piece of new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles [bottles of leather]; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

NGELS 'rolled away the stone' from the grave of the Lord, and when He arose they 'wrapped together' the 'linen clothes' wherewith He had been buried, and stood as sentinels to announce a risen Christ, saying, 'HE is not here, for He is RISEN!'

Very unlike the work of these angels is the conduct of those who are dressing up, with what has been cast-off, a *mummy-form* of Christianity, rolling a great stone against the door of the Church, and saying, 'HE is not here, for He is' BURIED!

The moral atmosphere of the Church has become

infected by a wide-spread and fatal pestilence, the popular name of which is Ritualism. This religious epidemic consists in an unaccountable mania for highly-wrought altars, beautifully carved crucifixes, splendid vestments, smoking incense, surpliced choristers, and a whole host of other appendages, which viewed together might remind one of a magnificent dolls' show, or fancy fair on a grand scale. Such sensuous symbols, and 'traditions and customs,' seem to assume that, in an intellectual point of view at any rate, the present age is greatly deteriorated, inasmuch as men as well as women are willing to become 'babies to be amused, and fools to be trifled with.' Perhaps some may be allowed to excuse themselves for these signs of mental and moral imbecility by saying that it is but reasonable sympathy, seeing that Papa (Pius IX.) is in so distressed a condition through recent reverses, to give some heed to the maternal beseechings of the 'mother Church,' and at least to *profess* to be making haste back to her embraces.

Both Popery and Puseyism are but imitations; the former of Judaism, mixed with heathenism; the latter of Popery; the adherents of both proving themselves ridiculous by producing only a burlesque. Judaism was too grand and sacred an economy for successful imitation. God Himself was its founder, prescribing all its minute details and superintending the work of its establishment. Nevertheless, it was but a local, sensuous, and temporary economy, to be followed by what was to be universal, spiritual, and for all time. It was but a

picture, a heavenly 'pattern,' 'the shadow of good things to come.' But the most beautiful picture becomes old by time; the most costly and useful 'garment' obsolete by usage; the chastely-cut 'bottle' or vessel marred and leaky through wear; and the richest 'wine' used up, or rendered useless.

Thus does the Saviour reason respecting Judaism. The Christian dispensation was to supersede and supplant the Judaic religion. The 'garment' was once new and beautifully embroidered; the vessel was once fresh and strong, filled with new wine; but the garment had become old, soon to be a rag; the vessel had become leaky, no longer capable of service. The 'new' and stronger thing was about to supplant the 'old' and weaker, and make a 'rent.' This 'rent' *was* made when on the cross the world-wide truth was proclaimed that henceforth there was to be no longer any 'agreement' between the 'old' and the 'new'—when, responsive to the Redeemer's last words, '*It is finished*,' 'the veil of the temple was *rent* from the top to the bottom!'

The types and shadows of the ceremonial law were now fulfilled—the shadow henceforth to give place to substance, the form to the power. The smoking incense of Jewish altars might lift its last curl to heaven, its upward direction betokening that 'the way into the Holiest' was now made by the great Sacrifice, to which all others, from Abel downward, had reference. The Aaronic priesthood might now retire, for their office

had been rendered obsolete. The high-priest might leave 'the holy-place,' for there remained 'no more sacrifice for sin.' The people might depart in peace from the temple, because the world's Priest had, by His one offering, 'brought in everlasting righteousness,' 'made peace' by 'His own blood,' and 'opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.' The shadows of night had given place to the clear dawn of day; and all 'lighted candles' were to be put out by the shining of the sun. Henceforth there was to be '*the dispensation of the Spirit.*'

To this spiritual dispensation the second parable refers—that of the old and new 'wine.' The Jewish Church had hitherto been the chosen vessel of the communications of the Spirit. By 'Moses and the prophets'—'holy men of old,' God spake 'by His Spirit.' But the power that darkened the sun, severed the rocks, rent the veil of the temple, opened the graves of the dead, likewise broke the old vessel of the Jewish institution. Through all the future, *one* medium only was to be known for the communications of the Spirit of God. That one exclusive channel is CHRIST—God's chosen vessel, 'filled with the Holy Ghost,' having received the Spirit 'without measure.' As there is 'no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,' so is there no other Divinely-appointed medium whereby the Church can receive the teaching and power of the Spirit. The grand condition is, '*Through Christ*

Jesus'—'through *Him* we have access, by one Spirit, to the Father' (Eph. ii. 18). 'There is no *order* of worship, God acknowledges but this order; nor *form* of worship, nor *uniformity* of worship. Nothing will compensate for the absence of this. People may bend to the same sounds, may utter the same words, without God's order of worship. And not only in worship, but in all God's descendings to us, and in all our ascendings to God, *this is the order:* He never comes down to us, but *through the Son,* by the Spirit; and we never ascend to the Father, but *through the Son,* by the Spirit.'

To secure the true character and power of worship, we have but to secure the presence of Christ. But surely it requires not lighted tapers to attract Him, 'the Sun of Righteousness;' or sweet incense to regale Him, 'the Rose of Sharon;' or white choristers to please His eye, who looks for a clean heart, rather than the colour of a dress. If these, and such like things, be essential to the presence and power of the Spirit, how comes it to pass that where they are most absent the power of Christ is often most manifest? What the eunuch failed to find when surrounded by the imposing circumstance of temple-worship and ritualistic observances, he obtained amidst the solitude and silence of the 'desert,' in faith's reception of the Spirit's testimony of 'Jesus,' as 'preached by the lips of Philip' (Acts viii. 26). Not unfrequently has the obscure garret or mud cottage been consecrated by the presence of Christ, in a manner and measure seldom felt in association with religious services

in which the ritual element preponderates. 'The dim religious light' of the ritualistic cathedral is dim indeed compared with the spiritual glory emanating from the beggar's chamber, who with a diseased body, and bed of straw as its sole furniture, is himself, in his spiritual being, a well-furnished temple. That temple's altar is his humble heart; its incense, the breath of frequent prayer; its eucharistic elements, not a wafer of paste, nor the fermented juice of grapes, but Christ Himself, 'the Bread of life,' and the wine of the Spirit. No wooden crucifix meets the eye of flesh, but the crucified One is seen with the eye of a strong faith. Clothed choristers there are none, and the melody of human voices is not to be heard; yet is the soul clothed in a righteousness which maketh whiter than snow, and heareth the voice of Him whose name is

> 'Music to the sinner's ears,
> And life, and health, and peace,'

and whose declaration is 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end!'

True worship is thus declared to be essentially and purely spiritual, and independent of the material. It is 'a fact in history, that as in earlier days, so still, just in proportion as Christianity extends through human agency, it *deteriorates;* it loses, as if by a sort of necessity, much of its superhuman character, and becomes more earthly in its aims and ends.'

Notwithstanding, the sensuous and the material is

the most popular in religion. It was so in the day of Christ. It was so in the days of the apostles. It has been more so subsequently; and, according to appearances, will be most so in our own time and time to come. A religion of form and sense is a religion naturally congenial to the corrupt taste of a sinful creature; so it is readily preferred before the religion of spirituality and of faith. Even the 'woman of Samaria,' notwithstanding her gross immoralities, could have, and boast in, a religion of this sort. Hence we find her readily and volubly entering into conversation with our Lord on the subject of religious worship. Judging from the character of her own words, it would seem that she regarded herself, to some extent at least, a religious person. And why not, if religion consisted chiefly in the sanctity of particular places and special times? To prove that such was not the nature of spiritual religion, the Saviour, in reference to the great work of salvation which He was about to accomplish, said to the woman, 'Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth' (John iv. 21, 24).

With these words of our Lord, uttered in reproof to a dependence on a mere carnal religion, His whole course on earth was in strict accordance. 'Though he observed the law, and spoke with reverence of the temple, we very rarely find him conforming to any

matter of pure ritual. We read much of His teaching and preaching, but nothing of His connection with the temple, or its priesthood, in the way of worship. Nearly all the portions of His public life place Him before us under the lights which are moral and spiritual, rarely ever in connection with anything of a ritual nature. He adopted the rite of baptism, and originated the rite of the last supper; but can anything be imagined more free from the ornate or the artificial than those services, in the forms in which He sanctioned them? In no stage of His life, in none of His appearances after His death, was there the slightest indication that any rite was designed to be permanent among His followers, beyond these two simple observances.'*

It was against ritualistic tendencies that the apostle Paul so persistently and faithfully uttered his note of warning. And his was the voice of one of no mean authority in the question of ritual, seeing he knew so well what it was by experience; what it was, too, by way of contrast, in the experience of the 'new' and 'better' thing. Nevertheless, his remonstrances were not heeded by many, who turned back to 'the beggarly elements' of a 'carnal' and ceremonial religion; as it appears, there were some among the disciples of John who having been baptized by John into a new dispensation, afterwards proved their preference for Judaism, saying, '*the old is better.*'

* Dr Vaughan.

Such was the taste and verdict of the Pharisees with whom the Saviour was now in contact. Their *own* religion was more *palatable*. It was less powerful as a morally explosive element. The new wine would break and 'burst' their long-loved forms, and by a moral revolution change the whole face of things; and this was not at all to their liking. They could be rigorous Pharisees, 'fast twice in the week,' 'give tithes,' 'make broad their phylacteries,' and 'make long prayers,' and supplement the whole by living selfish lives, and robbing the widow and the fatherless. The 'new wine'—the power of a spiritual religion, the ever-fermenting opposition to all evils, *heart* evils as well as evils hidden from outward view—this was not palatable, not to their taste; so their religious preferences illustrated the words —'No man having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new; for he saith, *The old is better.*'

Hence a natural or carnal religion has become dominant. The heart will not have a religion divinely simple, and divinely perfect; so it seeks to manufacture appendages, or to establish a new one—a mummy representation, dressed out in ecclesiastical millinery, perfumed with incense, and illuminated with candles. The indwelling presence of Christ in the hearts of His people, and in the midst of His Church, is too spiritual a truth for formalism: hence a simple *commemorative ordinance* has been converted into a mysterious sacrament.

All this, and much more allied with it, is but the

natural outgrowth of religious pride, of self-righteousness. Man 'cannot dig,' and 'to beg' he is 'ashamed:' so he borrows. Adam lost his garment of innocence; he could not provide himself with a new one; to go to God and ask for one, he was ashamed: so he went and borrowed 'fig-leaves' to try to mend his mischief. But God would not have it so. This gave rise to a 'new' garment made by God Himself—prefigurative of Him who is the soul's only true religion, even Jesus, 'who is made unto us righteousness,' and whose righteousness is 'unto all and upon all them that believe.'

Ritualism is the repetition, on a large scale, of the folly of our first parents in seeking to devise a righteousness of their own making. It is human pride setting up an establishment of its own.

Greatest evils spring from small beginnings. So with the evil of which we now speak. Popery, the mother of Puseyism, grew from a germ; and that germ was first planted in some individual heart. Then it took root, and sprang up, and spread out its tendrils, running from heart to heart, and from church to church, like wild weeds. The first 'rent' in the garment was followed by a second, and that by a multitude. The first leak in the vessel made way for a larger one, and that for a still larger. 'A stitch in time' might have saved the dress; a single effort the vessel. So thought the apostle when he sought to arrest the fatal progress of ritualistic error, saying, 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.'

'A lie always needs a truth for a handle to it, else the hand would cut itself which sought to drive it home upon another. The worst lies, therefore, are those whose blade is false, but whose handle is true.'

Ritualism is the 'blade' of the 'handle' of Protestantism. By this weapon, we fear, the sin of Herod will be repeated—'the innocents' will be slain. The consequence will be 'lamentation and great mourning'—Protestantism weeping for her children, '*because they are not.*'

Christ, or Self?

LUKE V. 36—39.

And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

HE chief power which the Saviour had to contend with, when on earth, was *religiousness.* It was ever meeting Him in some form, and obstructing His path. The principal representatives of this opposing power were the Pharisees. Hence to the Pharisee were directed the most withering reproofs. The honest doubts of the truth-seeker, and even the immoralities of the severely tempted, the Saviour could and did deal with tenderly; but the seared consciences and obdurate hearts of the Pharisees threatened to tax

Divine patience and provoke Divine judgment. They were not only 'whited sepulchres,' but 'open sepulchres,' polluting with a moral contagion every neighbourhood into which they came. They were everlastingly propounding questions of 'days,' 'fastings,' 'washings,' and endless externalisms.

It was one of these questions that elicited from the Saviour the remarkable and significant words at the head of this chapter. The Pharisees meet Him with a question of 'fasting.' In answer to the question He tells them that fasting is out of place at a marriage festival. The disciples of John might consistently fast, inasmuch as they were but *John's* disciples, not having yet received the Messiah in the fulness of faith. It was to Him that John pointed in all his teachings, and with reference to Him that he baptized; although around Him many of them, perhaps most of them, had not believingly gathered. His disciples did not fast, because the 'Bridegroom' and 'the children of the bridechamber' were together in the union of a living fellowship—no longer in symbols, and rites, and the figure of John's baptism, but in reality and power. The days, however, would come when fasting might with consistency and with significancy be observed—when the vital doctrine of a personal, risen, and living Christ would be practically ignored by the professing Church—buried amidst 'wood, hay, and stubble,' as a nugget of pure gold amidst rubbish,—when His cross would be so covered over with gaudy decorations as to hide His sacrificial

work, while the cloud of a profane incense would darken the clear heavens, and shut out from the sinner's view the mediatorial Throne where He would be seated as the world's Redeemer and the Church's Intercessor.

'Those days,' thus foretold by Christ, have 'come.' We are now in them; and if ever, in the history of the Church, there was a call to the faithful disciples of Jesus to 'fast' with the fasting of the spirit, and with the sackcloth of soul-lamentations—that call should be heard and heeded now.

In the preceding chapter we have seen the application of these words to the popular ecclesiastical evil of the times. They may now be considered in the light of a more general and comprehensive application—as illustrative of the soul's true relations to Christ—as affording the only true interpretation of 'life and peace.'

THE OLD AND NEW GARMENT.

Human righteousness is like a garment torn and stained—which cannot be repaired, nor cleansed, so as to satisfy the pure eye of the perfect God. 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.' 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' In other words, the perfect and the spiritual cannot be born of the imperfect and the carnal. 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God.' In other words, to please

God we must be able to present to His inspection a garment not 'spotted by the flesh.' But where is it to be found? Who will be bold enough to say that he can produce it? If self-originating, what of the necessity of the atonement? If self-dependent, in any degree, what of the perfection of the atonement?

The attempt to seek justification in anything connected with the human—in anything *outside* Christ—is self-righteousness. Many who would be greatly astonished at being charged with the sin of self-righteousness, are, nevertheless, guilty of it. In the most unlikely persons, to outward sight, and in things least suspected, the evil may be traced. There are Christians who have for years been making their religious history a mournful dirge instead of a song of gladness, ever repeating the sad lament—

> 'Tis a point I long to know,
> Oft it causes anxious thought,' &c.

The reason of this is that *self*, in one way or another, is mixed up with the soul's ground of peace. The eye is unduly busy in looking at the 'rents' of the 'old garment,' and at the flaws of the 'old bottle.' Soul-rest will never be found as a permanent possession till self be fully supplanted by Christ—in the complete renunciation of all 'confidence in the flesh.' '*The new agreeth not with the old.*' However much the old garment may be patched, and mended, and improved, by outward acts of morality, or by inward control, it can

never be made presentable to the eye of Infinite purity. We may stick together the broken earthenware, and paint, gild, and varnish it; so that to outside observers it shall be hardly distinguishable from what is pure, and sound, and of finest material: notwithstanding, it will never be made fit for 'the King's table.' The indispensable condition of acceptance is a condition which another, and not ourselves, must render: a condition which another *has* rendered. It is contained in these words—'*without spot, and blameless.*'

Hence the plenitude and power of the salvation of Christ. Salvation is not a work of *repairing*, but of creation. 'If any man be in Christ he is *a new creation.*' 'My righteousness is in heaven,' said one, on discovering for the first time that his own life was a forfeiture, and could therefore never yield the fruit of peace.

Through sin we have lost a garment; and through Christ we have found one of a better sort. We have lost the righteousness of innocence, and found 'the righteousness of God.' This righteousness was proclaimed 'in a figure,' by the 'coats of skins,' which 'the Lord God made' in Eden to cover man's nakedness—the character of the clothing, and the mode of its preparation, declaring the superhuman nature of the righteousness of Him '*who is made unto us, of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.*'

The attempt to provide clothing of human merit is the repetition of Adam's foolishness in trusting to his garment of 'fig leaves.' In soul concerns, as well as of

secularities, human nature is snail-like—clinging tenaciously to the shell: to disprison you must break the shell. Man will severely afflict himself—will weep, do penance, give alms, toil like a slave, to save self; but self must do the work, or have some credit in its accomplishment. Naaman was prepared to save no expense, or time, or trouble, in order to find a remedy for his malady that accorded with his own ideas, and with the pride of his own heart.

There being no '*agreement*' between the old and the new, rents and breakages follow. This is particularly the case with those whose religion is nothing more than morality. With all such the evil propensities are stronger than the good. Human goodness is weaker than satanic evil. 'The strength of sin is the law.' The law forbids, but sin craves; and the natural taste is for the evil—for the 'old wine.'

An explanation is thus furnished of the short-lived piety of those who 'endure but for a season,' and then 'fall away.' Theirs is a human religion—mere reformation and improvement of outward character. A new piece is put on to the old garment; new wine put into old bottles; but 'the *strength* of sin' is soon made manifest. The power of some strong temptation assails, and there is 'rending and breaking.' The man's religion is built on a human foundation. He is labouring after good fruit of its kind, but sticking it on to a bad tree; consequently the first strong winds blow it off.

The house is beautiful to superficial observers, but it is built on sand, and is therefore insecure. A religion not based on Christ must come to nought.

THE OLD AND NEW WINE.

Here, also, we have the correction of the prevailing error among Christians, already referred to. Whenever they become conscious of some sin of omission or commission, they lose their peace. And why? Because their peace was grounded on *self*, instead of Christ. They have soiled and torn their garments, and are ashamed; and so they ought to be! but *their* garment is not *Christ's;* that remains intact; it cannot be deteriorated: it is a righteousness that cannot sin (1 John iii. 9). The one is a garment 'spotted by the flesh. The other is 'without spot and blameless.' The wine of the Spirit does not flow through the impure and leaky vessels of human hearts; but through the immaculate and divinely consecrated channel of the Spirit of Christ. The heavenly wine cannot be exhausted, although its influence may be, at times, exhaled amidst the surroundings of a worldly atmosphere. The 'new wine' is contained, not in the 'old,' but in the 'new' vessel, whereby '*both* are preserved.' Did the 'old bottles' hold the 'new wine' its safe keeping would not long continue; it would soon be as wine 'spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again.'

We learn, moreover, that as Jesus is the Divinely-chosen vessel for the communications of the Spirit, the

measure of our abiding in Him will be the measure of our being partakers of the Spirit, determining our spiritual power. 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.'

This is the only power that can enable us to 'keep our garments unspotted by the world,'—so walking as to reveal as little of *self* as possible, in any of its manifold developments, 'that the shame of our nakedness may not appear.' To this end we must do practically what God has done judicially—*disown* the old garment and bring the old vessel into *disuse;* fortifying the soul against all solicitation to evil by saying—'*I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on?*' Then, concerning our life, others will be constrained to acknowledge—'*These men are full of new wine.*' Thus our joy and practical holiness, our peace within and power without, will '*both be preserved.*'

Four Seasons.

ECCLESIASTES III. 1, 2, 6.

'To everything there is a season.'

'A time to be born, and a time to die: a time to get, and a time to lose.'

SOLOMON here presents us with a portion of his wondrous autobiography, his experience of things of an earthly character—of things done 'under heaven.' Irrespective of their moral qualities he writes down a list of what men are engaged in as objects of interest and employment. Apart from the question of *sin* he is considering what is 'good' for man as a dweller on the earth, and to what extent things 'under the sun' can satisfy.

He characterizes man in the pursuit of pleasure as one that 'laboureth' and findeth 'travail.' This was his own character. His experience had been that of 'labour and sorrow.' And it was good that it was so; for it was sorrow and 'travail which God had given' to '*exercise*' his soul—to make him see the emptiness of

all earthly cisterns, and to learn the goodness of God, who, like a loving Father, puts a bitter draught into the cup of sweet poison to prevent the suicide of the soul. 'God doeth it that men should fear before Him'—that men should fear to entail misery by the wilful violation of Divine and beneficent laws.

Here we have a key that gives us the moral quality of this catalogue of earthly engrossments. God 'hath made everything *beautiful* in his time.' Here is the *test* to the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pursuits. To '*kill*,' to '*rend*,' to '*hate*,' to make '*war*,' are certainly not among the things that are morally 'beautiful,' and are therefore not of God. By this principle we may regulate many things of life. It is beautiful enough, 'in its season,' to hear and see the 'laugh' and 'dance' of the merry child, in the outburst of its innocent glee. But the 'laugh' and 'dance' become very different things when indulged in at places, and connected with attendant circumstances, that have a tendency to minister only to the 'lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.'

The different characters and experiences of mankind, in a large measure, might be summed up in the words comprised in the first eight verses of this chapter. How many seem born only to a heritage of woe! 'born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.' Of such may it not be said that their life is 'a time to *weep?*' The life of the covetous man is 'a time to *get*' and a time to '*keep*.' The life of the malicious is 'a time to *hate*.'

The life of the philanthropist is 'a time to *love*' and 'a time to *heal*.' While with the bulk of humanity, who hold life loosely as a cheap and trifling thing, the individual history of each life might with great brevity be inscribed on their tomb-stone as the most fitting epitaph, —'A time to *laugh* and a time to *dance*.'

THE FIRST SEASON.

'*A time to be born.*' There are many circumstances that render it a profoundly interesting thing 'to be born.' In itself, considered apart from its relations to sin and grief, life is a very sweet and blessed thing. Who can look on the glowing face of the child as he shouts 'with the ecstasy of being, clapping his hands for joyfulness,' and not say,—

> 'Surely, O life, thy name is happiness and hope,
> Thy days are bright, thy flowers are sweet, and pleasure the condition of thy gift.'

'To be born' is to be made a partaker of that life which the Creator breathed into man and thereby made him 'a living soul,' a soul made 'in the image of God,' endowed with faculties of mind and body high and noble: a nature, in itself considered, 'a little lower than the angels,' and which by being assumed by the Son of God, has been lifted to a dignity 'much higher than the angels.' 'To be born' is to come into an existence which is capable, through union with Christ, of being linked to the Divine, and of mounting up to a moral elevation inconceivably glorious. What mingled emo-

tions of hope and of fear should possess the soul of the parent when for the first time the eye looks on the form of the new-born child! What fearful responsibility to hear the announcement,—'Another human life has come into the world!' What joy and hope should be inspired by the reflection—the event may link the life of the child to Him, and make it a partaker of His nature, of whom it was once recorded in the registry of earthly events,—'Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given; and His name shall be called Immanuel—*God with us.*'

But before the perfections and glories of the Divine nature can be inherited by human beings, the sin and imperfections of the human must be atoned for; for 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.' How soon is this natural unfitness for the kingdom of heaven made manifest, the child going astray as soon as it is born, 'speaking lies;' and every successive stage of its progress making the form of its moral defectiveness more and more positive in its development! To make it a truly blessed thing 'to be born' the soul must be born a second time, 'born of God,' 'born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, which liveth and abideth for ever.' Without this life the soul can never say in the fullest sense of the words, 'the light of the sun rejoiceth the heart.'

What multitudes are living without this higher life, this second and Divine birth. To say of such that they live is an abuse of language: they but breathe and exist:

they have forfeited the true nobility of life, and prostituted it to the mere gratification of the senses. 'You might as well go to the catacombs of Egypt, and scrape up the dust of the mummies, and knead it into forms, and bake them in your oven, and call such things men, and present them as citizens and teachers for our regard,' as to attach the high and lofty designation of '*life*' to those who find 'a time' only 'to eat, and drink, and dress, and sleep.'

THE SECOND SEASON.

'*A time to get.*' For the sake of the moral order of this lesson I transpose the verbal order of the text. From the years of earliest childhood the desire of accumulation, of 'getting,' is signally displayed. It is seen in the infant's store-house of toys: in the boy's bag of marbles; and in the studious youth who finds an ever-growing pleasure in his increasing stock of books. In this human acquisitiveness men and women, in all ranks and in all stages of life, are but children of larger growth. They live to acquire, to 'get' pleasure, ease, honour, wealth, and fame.

The lamentation is that with all this 'getting' the world fails to '*get understanding.*' That which is 'better than gold; yea, than much fine gold; and more precious than rubies;' and which cannot be compared to any earthly substance, is sacrificed at the shrine of Mammon, or at some other altar of sense. Preëminent, as an example of this sensuous idolatry, was Solomon,

during the years wherein he failed in spiritual understanding. What 'a time to get' was his, with such opportunities, such wisdom, and such unlimited resources! Hear what he says,—'I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.'

There was a canker-worm at the root of all this getting. And why? because the soul's capacities of enjoyment are too deep and broad for anything 'under heaven' to satisfy. '*The well is deep, and there is nothing*

to draw with.' Soul-hunger cannot be fed with bags of money. A troubled conscience cannot be pacified with the shoutings of a trumpeted fame. The longings of man's spirit are insatiable, and cannot be met with aught that cloys. Iron can be ennobled by brass; brass by silver; silver by gold; gold by precious pearls. To ennoble the chief of material substances you must ally it with that which is *above* the material. It is so with the soul. That which is *below* it in quality cannot meet its wants. The material, however costly, is below the human. The human is below the Divine. The soul is super-human, and the Divine only can satisfy it. Gold, pearls, and sensuous pleasures, may satisfy the body; but for the *soul* there is nothing 'under the sun' that can be found as a fitting '*help-meet.*'

THE THIRD SEASON.

'*A time to lose.*' Getting and losing are necessarily related. In material, commercial, social, and domestic life, 'profit' is built upon 'loss.' The noble edifice has been reared at the loss of brick, and stone, and wood, belonging to another neighbourhood. The transaction of business on a large scheme is not unfrequently the impoverishment and ruin of those who carry on trade on a much smaller scale. The gay plumes and fine attire of those who move in an exalted social position, are in great measure worn at the expense of pale faces and withered bodies of those who sacrifice their life-blood with hard work and over-hours. The mother often

gives her own life in giving the life of another, and her subsequent health in supporting what she has given.

There is 'a time to lose' what we 'get.' All 'under the heaven' is marked by uncertainty; therefore all we get of earthly substance is unsubstantial. We take hold of pleasures, and find them shadows: of wealth, and find it hollow: of fame, and find it a bubble: we drink of the wine, and taste only the dregs at the bottom: we handle the fruit, so beautiful to look upon, and, lo! like the apples of Sodom, it turns to ashes at the touch. Well might Plutarch report of Alexander 'that he caused to be painted on a table a sword within a wheel, implying that what he had gotten by his sword was subject to be turned about with the wheel of change,'—that he might soon find 'a time to lose' what he had found 'a time to get.'

There is a time of getting by losing. 'He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it.' Self must be surrendered, and Christ received in its stead. To save the vessel the cargo, though highly valued, must be cast into the sea. It was when Jonah was cast overboard that the ship was safe, and the mariners free from fear. How many can thank God for a divine and gracious law of 'profit and loss!' In the loss of earthly friendships they have found the truest and best Friend. They have lost their gold, but found their God. They have parted with self, and found Christ.

The whole of a life of sin is 'a time to lose.' What waste, wear, toil, sorrow, and care, attend a course of sin! What shattered health, and palsied limbs, and pale countenances, and broken hearts, and ruined souls! These are 'the wages of sin'—the costly exchange-coin of the kingdom of darkness, which show man to be the greatest loser and Satan the greatest gainer. To barter all that is worth gaining for that which is worse than no gain, is surely loss indeed! Concerning such a loss well might the Saviour ask—'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

THE FOURTH SEASON.

'*A time to die.*' At all stages of life, and with all classes of human beings, the most certain of all seasons is 'a time to die.'

> 'Nothing can we call our own but Death;
> And that small model of the barren earth,
> Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.'

There is a time to die for those who have only just commenced to live. 'Childhood and youth are vanity' by reason of the power of death. How very early does the life of many close! The flower is nipped in the early bud; the fruit bitten in the early flowering; the wheat plucked in the early blade. But only to *reappear* in a brighter clime, where 'mortality is swallowed up of life.' There the young, sweet life is transplanted:

'Early, bright, transient,
Chaste as morning dew,
It sparkles, is exhaled,
And goes to heaven.'

With a large emphasis may it be said of every child that dies—'Earth has one angel less, and heaven one more.' Consequently every weeping mother may have 'the blessedness of knowing that an angel loves her.'

There is a 'time to die' for those who, in a spiritual sense, have not begun to live. To be called into the world of spirits unprovided with spiritual life, is to be impoverished indeed. When a man is willing to believe that his life consisteth in the abundance of the things he possesseth, his is a destitution without a name when called to part with that which has made up his life. What bankruptcy is this!

There is 'a time to die' for those who die in order to live. For such 'to die is gain,'—it is 'a time to get' what they will never find 'a time to lose.' It is to 'get' rest from toil, freedom from care, exemption from fear, complete deliverance from the dominion of sin. It is to 'get into port' after a stormy voyage—to 'get home' after school days—to 'get to sleep,' a sleep without dreams, after long, dark 'night watches.' It is to 'get' into unclouded light and unsullied purity—into the presence of God, where there is 'fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.'

The Christian is thankful for 'a time to die,' when God's own 'season' comes. It is the appointed home of infinite love and wisdom—the right time, and therefore *beautiful in its season.*

Heart Revelations.

MATTHEW XV. 28.

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

ESUS had been addressing the Jews—'the scribes and Pharisees' in particular. They were offended with Him, and with His truth. He leaves them, and departs 'into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon'—thus foreshadowing the doom of His Jewish rejecters, and the blessings to be brought to the Gentiles.

The evangelist Mark informs us that this woman was a Greek. By birth she was a Gentile—an 'alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and a stranger to the covenant promises;' and by nation she was 'a Syrophenician'—a native of that portion of Phœnicia which had been conquered by the Syrians; the country to which Tyre and Sidon belonged.

Highly-favoured Israel, like a vine planted in a goodly soil, had become a 'degenerate plant.' But here was one planted amidst scenes of idolatry and sin, bringing forth the fruits of faith and holiness. The few crumbs from the Master's table made her fair, and beautiful, and strong, while the unbelieving Jews perished amidst 'fulness of bread.'

In this deeply interesting narrative we have an impressive illustration of the words of the devout and aged Simeon, who, as he held in his withered arms the infant Christ, uttered this remarkable prophecy—'*By him shall the thoughts of many hearts be revealed.*'

The thoughts of several hearts are here revealed.

THE HEART OF THE PHARISEE.

'*Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat meat.*' These men were more attentive to their 'hands' than to their hearts. They had been so long inured to hypocrisy that they began to think that they could do with God what they had been long accustomed to do with men—*hide* their hearts.

Hence the Saviour travels directly to the seat of the evil—the heart. The result is that He 'offends' them. He offends because He is seen to be in possession of a secret which they had hoped was concealed to all but themselves; or because they did not believe in the existence of any secret that could possibly reveal in them

iniquity. Blindness possessed their eyes, deafness their ears, and hardness their hearts. They were 'blind leaders of the blind,' and would not hear the voice of the divine charmer, nor open their hearts to any but kindred natures.

The innate tendency of humanity is to repeat, in some measure, the conduct of these men. We are willing to be as religious as religion will carry us, so long as it do not carry us to the great spiritual centre—the heart. As soon as a man sees his heart fully exposed in the light of heaven, his religious self-complacency comes to nothing: as it was with Job when he came in contact with the revelation of the Divine presence.

Consequently the great aim of the gospel is to lay bare the heart by letting the light of truth into it; that we may be induced to take it to the only One who can cleanse it of its defilement, and heal its wounds.

The knowledge of two things leads to salvation—the knowledge of our own hearts, and the knowledge of the heart of God. The first lesson takes the soul out of self; the second puts it into Christ. The contrast between the Pharisees and the Gentile woman was this—the former did not know these two lessons; the latter did.

THE HEART OF THE DISCIPLES.

'And his 'disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered

and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' In this answer the Saviour expresses, not His own thoughts and feelings, but those of the Jews. They prided themselves in their distinguishing character and privileges as the 'peculiar people' of Jehovah — particularly in their relations to Messiah's kingdom. The disciples were doubtless more or less unduly influenced by the popular religious faith that all Gentiles were little better than 'dogs' in comparison with those who were the illustrious descendants of 'father Abraham.' Hence the cold Pharisaic request— 'Send her away; the barking is annoying: give what is asked, and dismiss the dog.' To which the Saviour, in substance, says, 'What have I to do with a Gentile? you ask me to help one who has no claims upon me as the "Son of David:" moreover, you ask me to pity one whose national relations you abhor: you therefore contradict yourselves: your creed and request are at variance: it is the popular traditional belief—in which as Jews you have long been educated—that "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."'

Thus an indirect but pungent rebuke is administered to the disciples for indulging, in any measure, in sympathies opposite to the spirit and genius of the Saviour's kingdom. Henceforth the Master would have them flee all mere Jewish traditions and exclusive sympathies, and learn of Him who was 'meek and lowly in heart,' and who while He was 'the Son of David,' was also 'the Son of Man'—'a light to lighten the Gentiles' as well

as 'the glory of his people Israel;' the 'King of the Jews,' but the Saviour and Friend of *humanity*.

Eighteen hundred years have made but slight improvement in the traditional element of religion. How very largely is the religion of the day made up of the ideas, prejudices, customs, and 'commandments of men!' The word of God is superseded by humanly-constructed articles, creeds, and confessions. The character of God as that of a large-hearted and gracious benefactor is misrepresented by what is stern and repulsive, whose outgoings of mercy are restricted within narrow limits, and made to flow through the exclusive channel of a favoured few—all others being counted little better than 'dogs' and 'castaways.' By reason of a traditional religion the energies of the Church are crippled, and souls made to stumble in the way of salvation.

We rejoice to know that the heart of the great Father is greater than the hearts of the disciples, the best of them; greater than the heart of the whole catholic church; and that the light of His truth is clearer and brighter and more joy-inspiring than the most time-honoured religious light of men—'dim religious light,' truly! God's truth and love, like the sun, are bounded by no terrestrial space. All human and ecclesiastical barriers are 'of the earth,' like the clouds that sometimes obscure the sun's glory, but in no wise impairing the essential character of what is only veiled by an impure medium.

THE HEART OF THE WOMAN.

It is recorded of the Israelites that their journey of forty years in the wilderness was for the trial of their hearts. '*Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart.*'

The Saviour was now conducting a process towards a similar end. He was trying the hearts of the Pharisees, and found only pride and religious intolerance. He was trying the hearts of His disciples, and discovered even there much that was foreign to His sympathies—much narrowness and exclusiveness of spirit. Pre-eminently He was trying the heart of the woman. Let us see what the trial revealed.

She was tried by circumstances of a great and pressing need. Her daughter was tormented with a devil. It is not necessary here to discuss the question as to what was the precise character of this demoniacal possession. Suffice it to say that the malady of the child created in the maternal heart a deep and overwhelming sense of *need*. All human help had failed; and she now comes to Jesus as the last remnant of hope, uttering the brief but potent cry—'*Lord, help me!*'

Three things tried this woman.

1. Her *patience* was tried. '*He answered her not a word.*' He appeared to take no notice of her, and to turn a deaf ear to her entreaties. 'The fountain of

mercy, usually open to every hand that only touches the hem of his garment, flows not: the much-lauded physician and helper will not heal or help: the friendly mouth, which is ever so ready to give comfort, is silent.'

This apparent indifference of God in the interests and prayers of His children has found its rehearsal in every age of the Church's history, in the personal experience of very many. In the hour of some great and urgent necessity we have gone to One who we felt could alone help us. We have laid before Him our petitions. With deep fervency and strong faith we have exclaimed —'*Lord, help me.*' This we have continued to do for the space of many days or months. But the response did not come. The clouds would not break to scatter the darkness, or to let the refreshing shower descend. Then, the soul uttered its lament of disappointment— '*I am weary of my crying, mine eyes fail me while I wait for my God.*' The night grew blacker; the storm waxed stronger; the moorings of the vessel were loosened; the rudder was lost; the stars all went out, save one. Once more the eye of faith looked at its solitary star; its waning light fell upon a distant hill; and the soul exclaimed—'*Yet will I look again toward Thy holy temple.*' We did look again, and the distant object came near; the darkness vanished; the day grew in clearness and brightness; the waters became calm; and our feet again stood on 'dry and solid land' within the holy temple of praise. The blessing, after long tarrying, came. Then we discovered that it came at the right

moment—that it was withheld from coming sooner in infinite wisdom and love—that had it reached us when first sought it would have been less weighty in blessing. We saw that the *patient waiting* was as necessary to the completeness of the gift, as it was to the fulness of joy to the heart of its recipient. We discerned that the salvation of the Lord is to be seen, at times, only by 'sitting still'—that the child's safety and future well-being were suspended on what for the moment was a heart-crushing trial—that had the night been less short, and the darkness less black, we might have steered our course by the light of our own reason, and thus suffered shipwreck. '*Therefore it is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of Israel.*'

2. Her *faith* was tried. '*But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away: for she crieth after us.*' It would appear from the answer of Christ in the following verse, that the request of the disciples was that He would heal her and send her away. The request was natural, seeing that they were unaccustomed to see any one sent away by Him not healed. Their motive apparently was defective, while the request appeared beneficent. It might be rendered thus: The best way to get rid of her is to heal her and send her away.

To the woman herself, who discerned not the motive, it was natural to suppose that the request of the disciples evinced kindness and sympathy exceeding the

heart of the Master, whose deeds of mercy had been reported as transcending those of all others.

Here was a circumstance peculiarly trying to faith. Does it not illustrate a corresponding experience in the faith of many in similar circumstances? We are tempted to think, when we look for Divine help and it does not at once appear, that were the aid possessed by some earthly friend it would immediately be granted for the asking—a mere intimation would suffice to secure the response of the heart and the relief of the hand.

Too readily do such suggestions come from an unbelieving heart. But we dare not and cannot cherish them. We know their dark origin. We know, and rest our souls upon the unerring testimony, that despite all appearances the kindness of God's heart surpasses the heart of creature-kindness as much as the fulness of the ocean surpasses the 'drop of a bucket;' and that if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more shall our heavenly Father give good gifts to them that ask him. Believing this, faith gathers energy, becomes the nurse of patience, stimulates prayer and inspires hope, grows into a 'great faith;' and with a giant's stature and might takes hold of wrestling doubt, doing with it what Jacob did with the wrestling angel—overcoming it, and obtaining the commendation and benediction—'*Great is thy faith! be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*'

3. Her *humility* was tried. '*Then came she and*

worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs.' Another link, according to appearances, in the chain of evidence that He was totally indifferent to her—an indifference that now partook of the nature of contempt. Might not the heart have been tempted to say—'Well, He need not add insult to indifference; nor need He repeat the taunt so often heard from the lips of the contemptuous Pharisees; I know I am a poor Gentile—nothing better than a "dog" in the estimation of the Jew; but I did not expect to be reminded of this by one who professes to put no difference between Jew and Gentile in His acts of mercy and beneficence!' Would it have been a surprising thing, considering the natural pride of the human heart, if she had in bitter scorn spurned the words, and in the spirit of Naaman turned and gone away in a rage? But no! She is thankful for the saying. It is a word of humiliation; but she makes it point to the high-road of honour and renown. It is as a sharp sword cutting to the quick of pride; but coming where little pride existed, she deprives it of its power to hurt, and taking it into her own hand makes it a 'two-edged sword' to cut another way, and achieve a glorious victory. She takes the place assigned her, and with it the blessing belonging to it. She takes the place of a 'dog' because it will insure an interest with the Master—she will be the *Master's dog*, and what master does not care and provide for his 'dog'? 'Yes, Lord, I am a

dog, but as such I belong to Thee, the great Master; I therefore *claim* the dog's portion—"*the crumbs that fall from the master's table.*"'

Well might the Master say, 'O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'

THE HEART OF CHRIST.

Hitherto the heart of Jesus has been hidden; like a garden enclosed by a high wall; like a fountain sealed by a cold and heavy stone. But the partition-wall is now broken down, and the stone rolled away by the hand of a strong faith. A blessed disclosure follows: the garden unfolds its beauties, and freely emits its spices, while streams of refreshment issue from the opened fountain. The disguise of love is thrown off, and love fully revealed stands before the object of its interest, saying, '*I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*'

God delights to *give*, but to be *receivers* we must come to Him empty-handed. He delights to give in a princely style—to fill the vessels that are brought to Him; but they must be first emptied. So long as the woman claimed a wrong relationship, addressing Christ as 'the Son of David,' she received nothing; but when she took her proper place, and acknowledged her true character, she was sent away rejoicing—'*having nothing, yet possessing all things.*'

Let us come to God on the ground of works, of merit, of relationships, and we shall be rejected; but let us come as poor outcasts, defiled Canaanites, under the curse, and we shall obtain the blessing; the Master will hand us the 'blank draft from the bank of heaven,' —'*Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*'

Thoughts about Christ.

MATT. XXII. 42.

What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?

MAN is a thinking being. He is distinguished above all other orders of earthly intelligent creatures by this faculty—standing in their midst as a monarch of thought, 'made upright,' to cast his eye on all around, and to lift his brow towards the stars, to remind him that every object of contemplation is but a letter, a sentence, a paragraph, or a page, in the great volume of nature which his Creator has written, and which has been written for him as an intelligent and meditative being.

This faculty of thinking is being continually exercised in answer to the question, 'What think ye?' Science, art, social life, multitudinous questions, subjects, and objects are appealing to human thought for judgment,—'What think ye, of this question, this object, this person?

'What think ye of Christ?' is a question that is startlingly significant just now. Satan is putting forth a strong effort to establish a religion without Christ. He cares not how religious people are so long as they are not Christians—followers of Christ. How strange a question for Ritualists and others to ponder is this—'What think ye of CHRIST?'

GOD'S THOUGHTS ABOUT CHRIST.

The poet gives us his thoughts in books: the orator his thoughts in ardent and glowing words: the painter his thoughts in canvas and colour: the musician his thoughts in sweet and stirring sounds: the sculptor his thoughts in stone and marble: the warrior his thoughts in deeds of noble daring and heroism: and the philanthropist his thoughts in nobler deeds of self-forgetting love.

In like manner has God given to us His thoughts. The whole material universe is but an expression of the Creator's thoughts. 'Thinking is creating with God, as thinking is writing with the ready-writer; and worlds are only leaves turned over in the process of composition about His throne.' But creation gives us not the best thoughts of God. The heavens and the earth alike declare the glory of God; but the perfect display of the Divine glory was 'in the face of Jesus Christ.' As the Divine author, artist, and benefactor, God's best thought, His finest conception, His chief and choice gift, was Christ. Christ is the Divine beau-ideal of all excellence

and beauty. What expressiveness does the Great Father use to set forth the character of Jesus as the perfection of beauty and the object of perfect complacency! He is the 'Rose of Sharon,' the 'plant of renown,' a 'bundle of myrrh,' 'like ointment poured forth,' a 'tree of life,' a 'vine' with clustering grapes. He is 'the light of the world,' 'the bright and morning star,' 'the day-star,' the 'day-spring,' 'the day's-man.' He is the heavenly 'bridegroom,' 'the fairest among the children of men,' 'the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.' He is the world's 'prophet, priest, and king.' In one comprehensive word, He is the 'WONDERFUL!' May we not add, 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain unto it'?

When Abraham deputed his servant to go in search for a bride for Isaac, he was to do two things: to tell the divinely-elect bride what Abraham *thought* of his son Isaac, and what he had *done* for him, in making him heir of all his father's possessions.

What Abraham did for his son Isaac God has done for Jesus—made Him 'heir of all things,' and given all things into His hands. Pharaoh gave to Joseph the key of Egypt's storehouses; God has given to His Son 'the key of David,' by which He 'openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth.' The king thought so highly of Joseph that he made him the prime medium of blessing for the supply of food in the years of famine. God thinks so much of Jesus that

He has made Him the exclusive channel of salvation to a lost and perishing world. 'The people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said, *Go unto Joseph!*' '*This is my beloved Son, hear ye him,*' is the language of the Father concerning Jesus. 'Through him we have access unto the Father.' 'No man can come unto the Father but by me.' What a friend and brother was Joseph to his distressed and famishing brethren! What a friend to the sinner is Jesus!—'a friend that sticketh closer than a brother'! Through Joseph his brethren had access to the king: through Jesus we are 'brought nigh unto God,' and shall eventually see 'the King in his beauty.'

'What think ye of Christ?' This is the question of the Father respecting His Son 'in whom his soul delighteth.' Do *our* thinkings accord with His?

WHAT GOD WOULD HAVE US THINK OF CHRIST.

Among the many who entertained false thoughts of Jesus, when on earth, there were some who said, '*He is a good man.*' Doubtless this was the conviction of many who refused to avow it; and probably of 'others' who said, 'Nay, but he deceiveth the people.' The Socinian would do well to ponder the question—Was He not a *deceiver* if He was *only* 'a good man,' seeing He declared Himself 'equal with God,'—'the Son of God'?

Hence observe—

1. *That God would have us recognize the Deity of*

Christ. 'What think ye of Christ? *Whose son is he?*' They who call in question the Saviour's Godhead are rebuked by three classes of intelligent beings—by angels, men, and devils.

Angels worshipped Christ as God. 'Let all the angels of God worship him' was the bidding of the Father when He brought into the world His 'first-begotten'—a command which they rejoiced to obey. Hence we find them, as the celestial host over Bethlehem's plains, announcing the advent of Christ in an anthem of worship. And throughout the earthly course of Jesus we find them in the attitude of worshippers—ministering to Him in the desert; strengthening Him in the dark and painful hour of Gethsemane; watching at His tomb; and witnessing His ascension to heaven.

Men worshipped Christ. To His cradle and to His grave alike they came in the character of worshippers. The truly wise could behold in 'an infant of days' the 'everlasting Father;' hence, 'there came wise men from the East to worship him.' 'We have found the Messiah' was the devout language of Andrew. 'We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write' was the joyous acknowledgment of Philip. And in an outburst of adoring worship Nathanael said, 'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel!' And subsequent to the hour when the disciples and the two Marys followed him to His tomb,

how many have rejoicingly and adoringly repeated the confession of Thomas, even of doubting Thomas—'My Lord, and my God!' 'Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ! thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.'

What men refused to do *devils* did. Satan himself was compelled to render to Christ involuntary homage. 'Thou shalt *worship* the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve,' were the strong words of One who was stronger than 'the strong one armed;' and before the imperial mandate Satan had to retire in unwilling submission. And what Satan failed to do *in speech*, his emissaries did—they confessed Him to be '*the Christ.*' 'And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.' 'What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most High God? I adjure thee that thou torment me not,' was the strange language of the man who possessed a legion of devils. Unbelieving and blasphemous men said, 'We know that thou hast a devil, and art mad.' Devils said, '*We* know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.'

My brother, the united testimony to the Deity of Christ, of angels, of men, and of demons, appeals to you, saying, 'What think *ye* of Christ?'

2. *In our estimate of Christ God would have us to possess confidence not only in His Deity, but in His*

moral nature—in His *love*. To angels He is the object of joyous worship because He is the object of their affection. His devout followers could fully trust Him because they had confidence in His heart. Demons worshipped but feared Him, saying, 'Torment us not,' because they loved Him not. 'Perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment.'

'As a man thinketh in his *heart* so is he.' If, through false judgment, I am mistaking a friend for an adversary, I shall comport myself towards him according to my wrong thoughts: '*I knew thee to be a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth.*' We shall be ill at ease, be out of our element, stand in constant dread lest our words and conduct be misinterpreted and misrepresented where we have not confidence. What restlessness of fear and suspicion pervaded the hearts of the Pharisees towards Jesus! How significant His words—'Wherefore think ye evil in your *hearts!*'

Man has lost his confidence in God. Herein is the secret of fear. To restore this confidence the Saviour has revealed Himself as infinitely worthy of being trusted — as 'perfect love,' the *knowledge* of which 'casteth out fear.'

In whatever aspect we view the moral beauties of Christ, we find Him in every way adapted to inspire the trust of our hearts. 'Never man spake like this man' may be said of His life, of His death, and of His

resurrection and ascension, as well as of His mere verbal utterances. All He said and did was the language of love — the *heart* speaking, and speaking to inspire the confidence of other hearts.

What a speaker was His *life!* What a life! How sublimely unique, unlike every other life!—a life without a flaw, without a stain, 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.' What simplicity! What majesty! How wonderfully blended! What a life must that have been of which even an enemy said, 'I find no fault in him!' Respecting the character of His life how often must the question have been asked, '*What think ye of Christ?*'

What a speaker was He by His *words!* How gracious! How truthful! How tender, yet how faithful!—distilling like the dew; dropping sweetness, like the honey-comb; teaching the ignorant; guiding the perplexed; comforting the bereaved; making glad the sorrowful; absolving the penitent; 'reproving, rebuking, with all long-suffering and gentleness.' After listening to His words and feeling their strangely insinuating moral power, how often must the inquiry have been made, '*What think ye of Christ?*'

What speaking power was in His *death!* What a demonstration of the love of His heart! What speaking blood was His!—'the blood that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel'—the one crying for vengeance to fall on the head of the murderer; the other crying for mercy, saying, 'Father, forgive them!'

After witnessing His death, and the mysterious phenomena attending it, how many must have felt sympathy with the centurion while they asked, '*What think ye?*' *was he not truly* '*the Son of God!*'

What a speaker was He *after* His death! How did He inspire confidence in the breasts of those to whom He appeared after His resurrection—speaking with them 'as a friend speaketh with his friend,'—eating with them as a companion and guest,—calling them His 'children' and His 'brethren,'—walking with them on the way to Emmaus, and so taking possession of their love and confidence, that when He left them they said one to another, 'Did not our *hearts* burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?'

And He is 'the same Jesus' *now!*—the perfectness and fulness of His love is the same. As He proved to His disciples by repeated appearings that He was the same after as before His death, so did He assure them by the lips of the angels, who with them witnessed His ascension to heaven, that He would remain the same: '*This same Jesus* who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.'

What a thought is this! Jesus is the same—the unchanged and unchangeable One—'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.' Did He, when on earth, open blind eyes, unstop deaf ears, heal the leper, cure the halt and lame? Did He stop the bier of the young

man, and to the weeping widow give back her only son? What He was eighteen hundred years ago He is to-day —'the same Jesus'—the same to give life, rest, peace—life to dead souls; rest to weary hearts; and peace to burdened and troubled consciences. He is the same living and personal Saviour! soliciting the trust of the heart, and seeking to secure it. Hence He is still the great speaker — speaking 'from heaven,' in the power of His perfect and finished sacrifice,—proclaiming by His having 'sat down at the right hand of the Father,' that there remains 'no more sacrifice for sin;' that through 'his one offering' He waits to *give*—as a free, unmerited gift—'*eternal life.*'

The Circle Rainbow.

REVELATION IV. 3.

And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

A SEMI-CIRCLE rainbow is all that presents itself to our vision, and that is often a very imperfect half. We see things in this world only by halves. Imperfection characterizes all our powers, and limitation all surrounding objects, and incompleteness all our pleasures. 'The things that shall be hereafter' shall be in *circles,* complete and perfect.

THE CIRCLE OF PROMISE.

When Jehovah set His bow in the clouds, He uttered these remarkable words to Noah: 'And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will *look upon it,* that I may remember the everlasting covenant.' The earth would yet again be filled with violence, and the hearts of the sons of men be bent on sin and folly; but He would

'look upon' the heavens, not on the provocations of earth.

Bright and blessed type of a higher truth, and a more permanent peace! God's bow of peace has 'passed into the heavens.' Did the Holy One look on *us*, He would see only that which is fitted to provoke His righteous displeasure. But He looks on One who is the object of a perfect complacency—His 'well-beloved Son'—in whom He is 'well-pleased.' And this is the confidence which we have in God, this our trust, our security, and this our song—'*Look upon the face of thine anointed.*' 'Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.'

The circle is '*round about* the throne.' We are near the throne because within the circle that encloses it—'in Him' who is on the throne. The evangelist John saw 'lightnings' proceed from the throne. But the fire cannot touch us. It travels from the bow to the earth: not from the earth to the circle; and we are within the circle. 'There is no judgment to them who are in Christ Jesus.'

The covenant of our peace, like Jehovah's covenant with Noah, is 'an *everlasting* covenant.' It is a circle —the symbol of eternity. Begin to travel round a circle, and you commence a journey that is endless: put yourself within it, and you find yourself within a house that has no door of exit. Jesus is the 'door' of salvation, and He Himself keeps it; and with His own

hands openeth and shutteth; and when He openeth to admit no man can shut; and when He 'shutteth in' no man can open. There are two mottoes on the door, one within, and one without. On the outside are these words—'Kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.' On the inside is this inscription—'Who shall separate us from the love of God?'

Some Christians are not exulting in these truths. They are saved, but do not rejoice in the conscious certainty of salvation. They never appear to see more than a part of the bow of promise, and that part is ever varying. And why? Because they occupy a wrong *stand-point*. Were it possible to occupy a position outside the earth where we could behold a complete circle rainbow, we should be furnished with a perfect illustration of the sole condition whereby the heart can enter into rest and peace. We must get *outside* the little world of our own thoughts, and feelings, and ever-changeful moods, before we can see clearly our complete safety and security in Christ. When thus lifted out of self we shall joyfully and adoringly behold the divine rainbow of covenant peace enclosing the soul like a circle. It shall be seen to be 'an emerald' circle—'like unto an emerald.' What is an emerald? A costly stone of a rich green—the emblem of that which is everlasting, ever fresh and permanent. Our peace will never be a rich and beautiful 'evergreen' till we are saved from self. 'Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is *stayed on thee*.'

THE CIRCLE OF TRUTH.

The ancient philosophers perplexed themselves in their search after truth. They failed to see that while truth is a perfect circle, it is not visible as a whole to mortals. 'We know in part, and prophesy in part.' In other words, we know but a small part of truth, and can teach only the part we know. Take any branch of truth, and see how small a portion we know of it. The anatomy of an insect will puzzle a philosopher through a whole life-term: and when he has studied it, and written about it, and exhausted, as he thinks, the subject, his successor writes a refutation of his mistakes. For thousands of years students of medical science have been studying the anatomy of the human frame; and still remain ignorant of the inferior part of their nature. The historian thinks he has accurately and chronologically given the details of history; and lo, in after years, his recorded facts are proved to be no facts at all. The biographer has presented to the world a careful and conscientious biography of some notable personage; but no sooner is the book published than the discovery is made that noble virtues have been omitted, and manifold blemishes misnamed virtues. Certain it is that the truest and deepest part of a man's life must remain hidden.

What shall be said when we ascend to the higher plane of truth? If such the earthy, what of the heavenly? If such the material, what of the spiritual?

If such the human, what of the divine? If mysteries enshroud the body, what shall be said of the mystic veil that conceals the nature, relations, and destinies of the soul? Take your stand on some spot of the earth, and comprehend within the sweep of your vision the heavens above you and the heavens of the antipodes: then, but not till then, may you hope to solve the whole of truth's problems. We know but '*in part.*'

But we shall yet know in full. Hereafter the whole circle shall be unfolded. Then our knowledge shall be perfected. The hieroglyphics shall be explained: the mystic handwriting interpreted: all clouds and mists of error be resolved into a clear white light, in which shall be not even 'the shadow of a turning.'

Moreover, the perfection of this light shall be seen in its unlimited progress. The path of light shall be a circle, a pathway without an ending, a journey from stage to stage, from one degree of truth and blessedness to another, 'from glory to glory.' The light shall 'wax stronger and stronger,' and the circle wider and wider, in its ever revolving and untiring course.

THE CIRCLE OF PROVIDENCE.

Much that has been said respecting truth may be applied to Divine providence. In the relations of human souls to their Creator there is, to the eye of sense, much that appears incongruous in the Divine character. Hence, in all ages of the world, men have been burdened with the sense of mystery in relation to Divine pro-

vidence which, like Belshazzar's visions, have troubled and overwhelmed them; and giving the rudder to sense, and not to faith, they have suffered shipwreck on the shoals and rocks of unbelief. Faith possesses its soul in patience; sense rushes at conclusions, and gets plunged into palpable darkness. Faith sees part of the circle, and knows that it is but a segment of an unseen whole. Sense prematurely concludes that what it sees is the entirety. Faith sees but a few leaves of the book of Providence, and can read only a few sentences of the hand-writing, yet knows that the whole volume is complete. Sense looks at the broken alphabet, and declares that it is impossible to find letters sufficient to spell out the love of God.

An old divine, in alluding to the words of the psalmist, 'Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in unrighteousness,' says,—'If a man should read only, "Thou art not a God," and make a full stop there, it would be blasphemy; but reading the whole verse, it is an excellent sense and an honourable declaration of God's holiness. Such errors will be committed in reading the books of Providence, if we fix our eyes only in one place, and make a full stop where God has not made any. We judge not of a picture by the first draught, but the last lines; not by one shadow or colour, but by the whole composure. The wisdom of God is best judged of by the view of the harmony of providence. The single threads may seem very weak, or knotty and uneven, and seem to administer just occasion of cen-

sure; but will it not as much raise the admiration to see them all woven into a curious piece of branched work? Consider, therefore, God's ways of working, but fully judge nothing till the conclusion, for that is to judge before the time. Judge not of providence at the first appearance; God may lose the glory of his work, and you the comfort.'

'Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.'

In the light of that morning shall we see light; and seeing, shall be satisfied as we stand before the full-orbed revelation of 'Grace and Truth,' around whose throne the emerald rainbow shall shed its calm eternal radiance, attracting universal admiration, and evoking from all hearts one loud and harmonious burst of choral joy.

Sin and Sins.

JOHN VIII. 6–8.

Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

E are told that the scribes and Pharisees who brought this poor woman to Jesus were actuated by an impious motive: they sought to lay a snare for Him. He had revealed Himself to be a divine messenger of mercy. He had repeatedly proved Himself to be the friend, not only of the friendless, but of the guilty—of 'publicans and sinners.' These men would now test the righteousness of His claims—as to how far He could exercise mercy in harmony with the claims of law. So they 'brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very

act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.' They reason among themselves thus: If He condemns her what better is He than ourselves? If he does not, where is the justification of His righteousness? This was very clever, was it not? But what does God care for cleverness? Sceptics and blasphemers may band themselves together, and sit in council forming their clever and impious schemes; but 'he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.'

Jesus took His place, as heaven's sun, in the temple. Professedly, it was the place of light. They who frequented the place as its chief visitors, boasted in a monopoly of the light: their language was, 'We see.' Alas for the empty boast! The light in them was darkness—'how great that darkness!' The darkness had so blinded their eyes that they could not see the sun shining in the temple. So stolidly blind are they that they bring Moses, who '*testified of Christ*,' to witness against Him. The result is a double divine testimony to the true character of Moses, and the false character of the scribes and Pharisees.

THE LAW OF MOSES.

The light did two things contrary to the expectations and wishes of these accusers.

It vindicated the *righteousness* of the law. The law which had been openly and grossly violated was an emanation from this light. It was the embodiment of eternal principles of rectitude and goodness, principles in harmony with the Divine nature, and essential to the maintenance of Divine order and human happiness—a law, therefore, 'holy, just, and good.' It was impossible for the Lord to find fault with these men simply on the ground of the character of their charge: he came 'not to do away with the law, but to fulfil it.' Had He spoken only as the light—had 'grace' been absent from 'truth'—answering the proposed question in a direct form, He too must have uttered words of condemnation. But He knew what was in their hearts, and answered them according to His consummate wisdom, and tender mercy to sinful weakness. And by the answer He judged the judges, and convicted them as guilty; and self-condemned they retired from the light—scathed, because not healed by its clear and fervent rays.

The light revealed the searching *spirituality* of the law. What these self-righteous ones gloried in as 'the law of Moses,' was the law of God: and 'God is light'—light so pure that to stand unslain in His presence we must possess a nature impervious to His 'consuming fire.' This woman was judged by her enemies according to the character of certain *sins*. The Lord judged them according to their character as *sinners*—teaching

them and us that *sin*, not sins, determines what man is in the judgment of heaven—that to offend 'in one point' is to be guilty of breaking the law.

The world is ever being tempted to judge at variance with the Divine standard, to conclude that certain outward conformities or non-conformities of moral life, determine man's spiritual status in the estimate of God. Sin exists outside its gross and revolting forms, which are so degrading and enslaving to their subjects, and injurious to society. As disease may be in the blood without ever stamping its fire-brand mark on the forehead, so may there be, and so are there, decent and indecent sinners alike, as in the case of the two brothers whose history is portrayed in the 15th of Luke's Gospel. The one was a very respectable sinner: the other quite the reverse. The one loved his sins rather than his possessions: the other loved his possessions rather than his brother's sins. The one went away from his father's house to go after his lusts: the other refused to enter his father's house when that which he lusted after was shared by another. They were both intensely selfish, but in different ways, and selfishness is sin, and the parent of all manner of *sins*.

'It is with sins,' observes a forcible writer, 'as with men or families, some have pedigree, and some have not; for there are kinds and modes of sin that have, in all ages, been held in respect, and embalmed with all the honours of history; and there are others that never were and never can be raised above the level even of disgust. The

noble sins will, of course, be judged in a very different manner from the humble, base-born sins. The sins of fame, honour, place, power, bravery, genius, always in good repute, will not seldom be admired and applauded. But the low-blooded sins of felony, and vice, and base depravity, are associated with brutality, and are universally held in contempt. . . . . The respectable and the disgusting are twin brothers; only you see in one how well he can be made to look, and in the other how both would look if that which is in both were allowed to have its bent and work its own results unrestrained. . . . . There are different kinds of vice, but only one kind of sin; viz. *the state of being without God,* or *out of allegiance to God.*'

In the days of the flood there were amiable and unamiable souls who alike perished. Wherefore? because they were not in the ark. 'And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.'

GRACE AND TRUTH.

The great question is how are our character and position to be rectified? It cannot be done by the *law.* The law is against us. We are its debtors. Its stern demand is, 'Pay me what thou owest!' And we have 'nothing to pay.' We are 'so impoverished' that we have 'no oblation.'

The necessity must be met by 'grace,' by grace *giving;* and giving in such a way that the lustre of the

'truth' should in no wise be impaired by the munificence of the 'grace.' The emergency has been met in Jesus. *'The law came by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.'*

The work of grace has been a work of *humiliation*, a working in the dust. Grace had to 'stoop' to lift up, to stoop very low, even to the dust of death.

'Not half a century ago,' says Robertson, 'a great man was seen stooping and working in a charnel-house of bones. Uncouth, nameless fragments lay around him, which the workmen had dug up, and thrown aside as rubbish. They belonged to some far-back age, and no man knew what they were, or whence. Few men cared. The world was merry at the sight of a philosopher groping among mouldy bones. But when that creative mind, reverently discerning the fontal types of living beings in diverse shapes, brought together those strange fragments, bone to bone, and rib to claw, and tooth to its own corresponding vertebra, re-combining the wondrous forms of past ages and presenting each to the astonished world, as it lived and moved a hundred thousand ages back, then men began to perceive that a new science had begun on earth.'

Similar was the character of the earthly mission of the Son of God. He 'made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient

unto death, even the death of the cross.'

'Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not. So when they continued asking Him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground.' Was there not some high significance expressed by this strange conduct of our Lord? Doubtless there was. Fallible beings may not venture to affirm positively what the great expression was. But we cannot err in looking at it in the light of the Apostle's words just quoted. Have we not in it a miniature picture of the Saviour's life-work? It was a work of profound humiliation—a working in the dust. His was a *double* descent—a descent from heaven to earth, and from earth to the grave. He 'stooped down' *twice.* Having stooped to earth, He had to say—'*Thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*'

Observe an analogy in the work of man's creation, and that of redemption. The Creator 'made man out of the dust of the ground:' then 'breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul.' Jesus redeemed the souls of men from the power of death, through His work of lowly love: then made them partakers of His own life in resurrection. He 'died for our sins, and rose again for our justification.' Descending into the grave He 'wrote' our pardon in His blood—'stooping and writing.' He afterwards rose again to proclaim pardon, and to give life. Among His

first words after His resurrection, were 'peace be unto you!' 'And when He had said this He breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.'

Such are some of the truths illustrated in this interesting narrative. Jesus was at work as 'Grace and Truth,' but 'straitened' in His operations, for His baptism of death was not yet 'accomplished,' by reason of which His work was not completed. Hence the expressiveness of the words—'I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!' But He pardons and absolves in virtue of the work so soon to be perfected; for in His lowliness and love He was digging a channel wherein guilt might be buried in everlasting oblivion, and the waters of life flow forth in their free and unimpeded progress.

And all who receive this pardon, and hear the terms of this absolution, and partake of this life, can challenge the universe to utter a condemnation. Jesus says, '*Where are thine accusers?*' Echo answers—*where?*

And why are no accusers to be found? Because the pardoned soul stands henceforth in the light. This light does two things: it reveals *sin;* and it reveals the blood that '*cleanseth* from all sin.' To stand with confidence in this light is justification and life: to go from it is condemnation and death. The forgiven woman stayed in the light, and with the light, and found the light to be '*the light of life.*' Had it been the light of Sinai, it would have been the light of judgment and death; for

in the light of the law only 'our God is a consuming fire.' The enemies of the woman went from the light feeling two things—the power of the light to condemn the self-justified, and to blind those whose boast was, '*We see!*' 'And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

The World's Teacher.

JOHN VII. 46.

Never man spake like this man.

AS the stars pale their light before the strength and glory of the orb of day, so should all the excellences of human teachers retire into the shades of humility when brought into contact with Him who 'spake as never man spake.'

The Saviour came into the world laden with divine thoughts which He only could express. He was a being clothed with wondrous novelty. Every fresh stage of His magnificent career was a new and wonderful revelation. Every word and act of His life was as the slow sublime process of spelling out in living syllables the alphabet of a language which none but divine lips could teach. Whenever He 'opened His mouth' or performed an action it was that He might throw around Him some rays from 'the excellent glory'—some thoughts from the infinite mind.

Christ came to teach the truth about God.

He was the manifestation of the Father—'the express image of his person'—'God manifest in the flesh.' The wisdom of the world sought to reveal God; but all its attempts were thoughts conceived in vanity and fashioned in foolishness: 'The world by wisdom knew not God:'—

> 'In its sublime research, philosophy
> May measure out the ocean-deep—may count
> The sands, or the sun's rays; but, God! for Thee
> There is no weight nor measure: none can mount
> Up to Thy mysteries: Reason's brightest spark,
> Though kindled by Thy light, in vain would try
> To trace Thy counsels, infinite and dark:
> And thought is lost, ere thought can soar so high,
> Even like past moments in eternity.'

How expressive are the words of the Redeemer: 'O righteous Father! the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee . . . and I have *declared* thy name!' The name of God was 'declared' on Sinai, where amid the thunder's roll and the lightning's fire God revealed Himself; but it was the revelation of awful *majesty*. The name of God was 'declared' in the 'burning bush,' where before the awe-inspiring spectacle the patriarch made bare his feet to stand on 'holy ground;' but it was the revelation of unapproachable *purity*. The name of God was 'declared' on the day of the world's great tragedy, when the sun put on sackcloth, and the earth was convulsed, and the graves

were opened, and the dead arose; but it was the revelation of Divine *justice*. But in the face of Him who 'endured the cross' we have a revelation of Divine love —a revelation which inspires the commingled emotions of solemn awe, of childlike confidence, and filial affection, which, divesting the character of God of the sombre, repulsive, and tyrannical aspect which a guilty world has thrown around it, clothes it with the attractive attributes of a Father.

Thus the great solicitation of the world, 'Show us the Father,' has been met. The Father has been seen in the Son, in the whole of His earthly history. In the words He spake, the tears He shed, the blessed sympathy He expressed for the grief of others, in His amazing condescension, His self-obliviousness, His forbearance under injurious treatment, His long-suffering and forgiveness, and His sacrificial death, we have the sublime response, '*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.*'

Christ came to teach the truth about man.

In the gospel only have we the full revelation of human worth. Apart from Christianity, man's importance and worth have been estimated according to physical strength, mental capacity, or social position. Hence poets, orators, warriors, and others ranked among the great ones of Greece and Rome. A man was great according to the worth of a literary production; the eloquence of a public oration; or the skill and success attending the exploits of the battle-field.

Much lower was the estimate of human life and worth characterizing other heathen nations prior to the advent of Christ. Of this fact Egypt affords a startling example. It was 'Satan's seat' of mental and moral serfdom. Its vast population was 'wholly given' to the flesh; the mind as dark as ignorance could render it; the heart as vile as lust could make it; destitute of everything in the shape of human dignity. 'Their Sphinx looked forth in blank amazement, staring into vacancy, as if wondering at something which it was too idle to explore;' while birds, beasts, and reptiles of the lowest order, were either worshipped as gods, or reverenced as superior creations, or exalted to a sort of social equality. The standard measuring their worth was that which 'changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.'

The Saviour appeared to publish to the world the great truth that spiritual goodness is the only true estimate of human greatness; that 'the soul is the standard of the man;' that man's worth is to be judged of by what he *is* rather than what he has; seen not in the advantages of time, but through the vista of eternity; that beneath the outward appearance there is lodged an undecaying principle, the germ of a future life, the seed of immortality. He came to bring to light 'life and immortality.' Dense was the darkness that overspread the soul, even where the innate consciousness of worth was felt, and the spirit instinctively longed for immor-

tality. Ignorance of the future overshadowed the heart like a pall of death.

Welcome therefore are the bright revelations of the gospel. The thick haze that bounded the horizon of things seen and temporal has been dissipated before the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Reality and substance have been given to the vague guesses and shadowy conceptions of philosophers; while the grandest of all questions becomes fraught with surpassing moment, and big with heavy responsibilities: 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'

Christ came to teach how God and man might meet.

There was a time in the world's history when no such instruction was required. Before the entrance of sin no barrier existed to intercept the union between God and man, in a holy and happy intercourse: man was the subject of Divine periodical visitations—a 'face to face' fellowship. But the human heart opened to sin and closed to holiness, and thenceforth sin became the great 'wall of partition.'

Hence the one great question of humanity in all subsequent ages has been,—'How shall a man be just with God?' Many have been the false and unavailing responses to this inquiry. The science of 'things in heaven, of things on earth, of things under the earth,' has been interrogated, but in vain. The bright discoveries of astronomy have failed to point out to the

gaze of faith that 'one star' which 'alone of all the plain can fix the sinner's wandering eye.' Botany, with all its fair and beautiful revelations, has failed to find the 'Rose of Sharon,' or to extract for the healing of the soul the 'balm of Gilead.' Nor have the unwearied researches of the geologist found the costly pearl, or the gold better than that of Ophir, wherewith to enrich himself and others with those 'durable riches'—'bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not.'

The voice of civilization has failed. By its influence the intellectual powers have been unfolded; the moral nature cultured; the social character improved; but peace of conscience has not been found. Civilization has failed, because it has touched in humanity chiefly the superficial.

Human religion has likewise failed. Heathen temples have been built, and heathen altars erected, where the worshipper has sought for the true oracle, and for the voice of the pacifying blood—where wearisome journeys, cruel penances, painful fastings, and rigorous multitudinous laws, have been observed. Here too failure has been signally manifest.

What human power has failed to do Divine power has accomplished. The voice of God has responded to man's deep and urgent cry. The silence of a speechless universe has been broken by the teaching of Him who 'spake as never man spake'—by His giving to the

world what the united wisdom of men never could have discovered, nor the combined forces of men have effected.

'*Once in the end of the age, Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*' Here we have the Divine declaration of the exclusive mode of the world's salvation. It is by Christ: by Christ's sacrifice: by His *one* sacrifice. What speaking power is in this sacrifice! 'The blood that speaketh better things than that of Abel.'

There is yet another voice. He spoke by His life. He spoke by His death. He speaks, too, by His *ascension* to heaven. 'This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God.' '*For ever sat down!*' No more to be a *standing* ministering priest. His work done! His sacrifice perfected! The way into the Holiest opened! *Sin* '*put away!*' ACCESS TO GOD!

Religious Esthetics.

DEUTERONOMY XXII. 9—11.

Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together.

SATAN'S thoughts and plans are the reverse of God's. The Creator looked upon chaos—a world 'without form, and void,' with brooding darkness. 'And God said, *Let light be!*' In harmony with material beauty and order, God made a man and filled him with light; his mind with the light of truth; his heart with the light of love; his whole soul with the light of holiness.

'The prince of darkness,' who hates the light, came forth into this world of light and beauty, and cast his envious eye over the higher light and loveliness of man's being. His object was to reverse the Divine idea—to change the light into darkness, the beauty into deformity, and the order into confusion; to make this

little moral world somewhat like himself. And alas, his dark designs succeeded!

God again appeared to vindicate His character as light and holiness: to do with this *moral chaos* what He had already done with the material—to provide light and to 'divide the light from darkness.'

This is what God has been doing through all subsequent time. In type, symbol, and prophecy, He has announced Him who is the great spiritual Sun by whom the darkness of sin is dispersed and light and holiness again restored to man in Christ. And all His dealings with the world have been, and still are, the varied instrumentalities whereby in chastisement and judgment He *divides* the light from the darkness.

Hence His dealings with His Church. He has made His children '*light in the Lord.*' They stand in the light of perfect holiness in Jesus. But practically they too often walk in darkness. This was the case with *Israel.* They were made a people 'near to God' —a *representative* people—*separated* from all other people as light is 'divided' from the darkness. But they often failed to walk in the power of holy separation. For which reason we find the Divine hand chastening them—seeking to keep the line of demarcation in its proper place.

As a 'peculiar people' God would have the children of Israel illustrate to the eyes of surrounding nations their holy character, and 'walk worthy of their high vocation.' No intermingling was to be allowed with

heathen character and practices: they and theirs, and all they possessed, down to the very cattle, was to know the distinguishing stamp of separation—of 'holiness unto the Lord.' The intermingling of different kinds of seed, the yoking of the ox and the ass together, the wearing of 'a garment of divers sorts,' were things in themselves involving no moral evil; but by forbidding these admixtures God had a great moral lesson to teach His people. That lesson was *spiritual separation.* And that lesson has been written for *our* learning. Blessed is he who reads, learns, and inwardly digests the lesson.

Apply the three-fold precept to the three-fold testimony of the Christian—the testimony of his *words:* the testimony of his *fellowship:* the testimony of his *walk,* or conduct.

THE MIXED SEED.

'*The seed is the word of God,*' said Jesus, in His parable of 'the sower that went forth to sow.' The Christian who is faithful in the testimony of divine truth is the true sower 'that goeth forth bearing precious seed,' who shall doubtless reap his bright 'sheaves' if he faint not. Whatever is opposed to this seed—whatever is foreign to it in character, or arrests its fall into good ground, or obstructs its growth when having taken root,—is the mischievous seed of 'the wicked one'—the seed of 'tares,' and of choking 'thorns.'

A teacher of truth, whether in the pulpit, the Sab-

bath-school, or from house to house visitation, or elsewhere, who on the Sabbath day seeks to scatter the seed of the kingdom; but during the week is busy in dealing out 'words to no profit,' has no more warrant to expect among any of his secular hearers the prepared heart for the true seed, than has the husbandman in expecting the culture and preparedness of his ground by the cultivation of chickweed. 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap.'

A Christian poet writes a book. With many beautiful and ennobling thoughts, it contains much that is weak and foolishly sentimental: the book is made up of 'divers seeds'—the 'wheat' and 'tares' are *mixed.*

A minister of the gospel preaches a sermon. Among many great and soul-stirring words he introduces the ludicrous, the amusing, the trifling. The sermon is composed of 'divers seeds'—the 'wheat' and 'tares' are *mixed.*

A Christian, for the entertainment of others, reads a book. It is a piece of fiction, a romance, or a play; but here and there is interspersed a startling and impressive truth, brilliantly and strikingly expressed. On account of the occasional gem of truth the reader finds an argument for the author's worth, and the legitimacy of his task in reading it to others. Without the instinctive skill of the bee he gathers poison with the honey, and too often prefers the former to the latter. If *he* does not others will; and apart from the will of both the sweet is lost and nullified by the preponderance

of the bitter. His words consist of 'divers seeds'—the 'wheat' and 'tares' are *mixed.*

A Christian parent, or master, with no intention, it may be, to do evil, makes a jocose or trifling allusion at the dinner or supper table to the preacher and his sermon; or begins a conversation foreign to the subject. That sermon has impressed the heart of the child, or of the servant. The thoughtless reference or untimed conversation has been injurious 'seed.' The words of wisdom are now mingled with the words of folly; truth with error. The seed is of 'divers' sorts—the 'wheat' and 'tares' *mixed.*

And 'what shall I more say' about this religious adulteration—these strange mixtures and medleys? The age is prolific of them. In books, lectures, and platform speeches, the representatives of Christ's religion are, at times, so 'wholly given' to the secular and profitless, as to make thoughtful 'men of the world' ask with reason—'By what process are we to discover the 'wheat' from the 'tares.' Solomon says, 'The lips of the wise *feed* many.' Alas, that the lips of wisdom should feed so many by words of foolishness! —that they should deal out more 'tares' than wheat—that they should change the material of bread into 'stones,' giving the poison of a 'serpent' instead of the nourishment of 'an egg.'

Let none misinterpret these words by making them into a protest against everything that is not strictly spiritual; as being opposed to the culture of the mind,

and of refinement of taste—the legitimate fruits of a sound philosophy, of true science, and of pure art. I speak here of those things which instead of elevating, debase man, filling the mind with foolishness instead of storing it with wisdom; and imparting to the powers of the soul a vitiated taste, in the place of enlarging and exalting them, and creating a healthful appetite.

THE UNEQUAL YOKING.

The second command is, '*Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.*' This precept illustrates the intermingling of persons of diverse characters and tastes. In certain relations this intercourse is indispensable. Constituted as society is, men of all characters and orders must have commercial fellowship and intercourse in various ways. Nor would it be at all a desirable thing—assuming its practicability—for 'the children of light' to be separated outwardly from 'the children of this world.' How then would the 'salt' put forth its 'savour,' or the light its shining?

Our Lord, when on earth, was a perfect example of what His disciples should be in their fellowships. He associated with all classes of men. We never find Him acting in sympathy with the monk. Such was His divinely beautiful and genial social character, that His enemies charged Him with being 'a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.' But while His body moved about among the crowds His soul found *fellowship* only with the few. Like the beams of light the

presence of Christ mingled among the impurities of all sorts of moral neighbourhoods without staining one ray of His pure character. He had contact and intercourse with evil, but no communion or fellowship with it. He met with men to teach, to counsel, to comfort, to cheer, to heal, and save; but the means He used were words of truth and acts of love. He stooped in condescension to human weakness, but never to satisfy man's foolishness. In Christ there was no unseemly and unequal 'yoking.'

The illustration here is singularly expressive. It refers to fellowship *in service*—the uniting of two opposite characters, with opposing interests, in a common cause. The ox being stronger than the ass, two evils must necessarily ensue. The stronger drags aside the weaker, and the weaker impedes the progress of the stronger; and the unequal yoking makes bad ploughing and a crooked furrow. The loss is seen in waste of time, of labour, of ground.

'How can two walk together except they be agreed?' And if two who are not agreed walk together, what is the agreement worth? In secular life two men united in partnership, of different opinions and opposite interests, cannot make any but selfish progress, each seeking his own; or unrighteous progress at the sacrifice of principle. Apply the principle to the higher life of the spiritual world. The Christian unites himself to one whose thoughts, and tastes, and habits are the re-

verse of his own. How can they work together harmoniously? The one would sow the seeds of truth and wisdom: the other would scatter error and foolishness broadcast. The union is sustained by a compromise to traffic conjointly in wheat and tares. The one would do the right thing: the other agrees not with his plans: so the right and the wrong are both agreed upon. What unequal yoking! Any good to be done under such circumstances must be done very defectively, or left undone. Otherwise it must be done separately; the ox must be unyoked and freed from his encumbrance. This liberation takes place when the Divine injunction is obeyed—'*Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*'

THE MIXED GARMENT.

The third command is—'*Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together.*

Too many there are who put on their religion as a dress for particular days and special occasions. The Sabbath sees them respectably and religiously attired; but the other days of the week find them wearing a garment of coarser material and of divers colours. A 'linsey-woolsey' Christianity is extensively popular.

This ought not so to be. The practical and outward life of a Christian should harmonize with his spiritual and hidden life which is compared in Scripture to 'fine linen, clean and white, the righteousness of saints.' Hence the Christian is exhorted in corresponding phrase-

ology to '*keep his garments*'—to 'hate the garment spotted by the flesh'—to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ'—to 'put off the old man with his deeds,' and to 'put on the new man.'

Christians are termed 'a peculiar people.' They *are* such by reason of God's estimate of them, and should be such in the estimation of the world, by reason of their sacred and peculiar spiritual clothing. They are 'a chosen nation.' Then their divine nationality should be unmistakable in their dress. They are 'a holy priesthood.' Then they should never put off their long-flowing priestly linen garments, but let them be 'for glory and beauty.' They are kings as well as priests—a '*royal priesthood.*' Then they should evidence their royal rank by their 'royal apparel,' for 'they that wear soft raiment are in kings' houses.'

What a *motive* does all this furnish to practical godliness! The priestly and royal robe is to be worn *always*, in all companies, at all times. It must suit the home as well as the sanctuary; the place of business as well as the home. Whatever place forbids my robe forbids my presence. Would the sacred vessels, and vestments, and rites of a temple be out of place at a carnival? 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost?' 'What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?'

A testing principle is here. The question is not simply what is lawful for a Christian to do; but what is seemly, beautiful, and accordant with a divine taste? The God of glory is very jealous of the glory of His

children. The Divine Bridegroom eyes with anxious interest the *outward* attire of 'the king's daughter who is all glorious *within.*' He would have the outward to correspond with the inward. The 'virgin companions' are they only who are duly qualified to adjust raiment so costly as that of 'wrought gold.' Many touches from the world will soon leave traces of soiled finger-marks. 'Wherefore be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.'

The Token of Friendship.

REVELATION II. 17.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

THE seven Churches of Asia may be looked upon as representative Churches, exhibiting the various forms of evil characterizing the Church of God in different ages of the world. In the Church of Smyrna, spoken of immediately before that of Pergamos, we see the power of persecution through which the saints had to pass. In Pergamos a different feature is seen, spiritual seduction, false teaching and bad living, the false doctrine and corrupt living of the 'Nicolaitanes.'

Is not this the prevailing form of the religious evil of the present day? In former times, like the Church

at Smyrna, persecution reigned, and tested the substance of men's religion, when many a faithful Antipas suffered for Christ. Now it is the power of Satan as a seducer, like Balaam. When Balaam failed to 'curse' he suggested to Balak another scheme, the mingling of Israel with Moab in its idolatry and licentiousness. Satan has ever been afraid of the Church, as was Balak of Israel's power; and knowing his inability to curse, or destroy, he labours to spoil, to corrupt. Even now is he putting forth his strong and subtle power in this direction, seeking to convert the Church to the world, introducing the material, the earthly, and the ceremonial; thus eating out the Church's marrow and fatness, and leaving it dry as summer dust.

In the midst of all this God utters His voice of warning, and calls upon us to be faithful, and to 'overcome.' '*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*'

'*The hidden manna.*' The soul's food is Christ, 'the true bread that came down from heaven.' In the manna descending from heaven and mingling with earth, a thing in the world but not of it, we are presented with a striking type of the Son of God living in a world where He found everything strange and uncongenial with His nature. The life He lived was sublimely different from the life of all around Him. When the

children of Israel beheld for the first time the bread which God rained down from heaven, they exclaimed, '*What is it?*' And when the Divine Antitype appeared, the astonished but unbelieving beholders said, '*Who is this Son of man?*' His Divine nature to a great extent was a hidden nature. His glories were, to most men, hidden glories; and the food on which He fed was not of earth: He had 'bread to eat which the world knew not of.' For forty days and forty nights He tasted not food of earthly growth, and yet He was being nourished by the hand of the Father on 'hidden manna,' for the sore and terrible encounters of the prince of darkness.

The same strong enemy is ours, and to stand against him we must be sustained by the same Divine aid. Satan, like Balak, is ever seeking to allure us from the path of faith and sacred allegiance. He would have us feed on forbidden food, and rest on forbidden ground. He would excite an unhealthy craving for the food of Egypt, and make our souls 'loathe' the 'bread of heaven.' He would turn our ears to the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, establish our dwelling among the idolatries of 'Moab,' weaken and imperil our soul's strength by the presentation of the world's blandishments, make us ignore our separate and distinct divine nationality as God's spiritual Israel; and thus blot out our name by converting us to principles, maxims, and habits wholly foreign to the life of Christ.

Our safety and strength must be found in the conscious reality of a life of faith, in fellowship with a

risen Christ, in sympathy with the mind and heart of God, in the felt power of that union which recognizes the fact that in Christ we are 'dead with Him' to everything opposed to His nature, and alive to that world to which He has ascended as the 'hidden manna,' the ever-living bread whereby His people are nourished and strengthened.

This source of strength is a life which the world sees not. Unlike the manna which lay all about the tents of Israel, seen by every eye, it resembles the portion that was laid up in the Ark in the 'Most Holy place,' and visible only to the eye of God. The unspiritual see not and understand not the joys of the spiritual. They marvel at their strange characters, and still stranger tastes and pursuits, and are at a loss to know how such visionary objects of faith can satisfy. Nor need we wonder; for only the spiritual eye can discern the 'hidden manna.' It is 'behind the veil,' in the 'holy of holies,' and none can see, and none can taste, but they 'who dwell in the secret place of the most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.' The life is 'hid with Christ in God;' 'in whom are *hid* all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.'

In the nature of things must it not needs be that every life is a hidden life that knows what it is to '*overcome*' in the holy war of faith and love? Purity of heart is a hidden life to the sensual: to know what it is the 'carnal' must be 'overcome' by the 'spiritual.' The pleasure of surrendering a self-gratification for the

good of another, is a pleasure hidden to the selfish: to know what it is self must be 'overcome' by divine 'charity.' Every act of meekness, gentleness, forbearance, and kindly absolution of the faults of others, is the power of a hidden life: to know it we must 'overcome' the spirit of 'anger, wrath, malice,' and all such roots of bitterness. Every victory over self, self-interest, self-ease, self-conceit, self-will, introduces the soul to a banquet of 'hidden manna' and heavenly wine; but none can taste the food, or drink the enlivening draught, but those who have kept the city-gates of their own spirits. Oh, 'the hidden treasures of wisdom, and knowledge,' and joy, which open and diffuse their life-giving streams to all who 'overcome;' but which remain perpetually sealed to all beside! '*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.*'

'*And will give him a white stone.*' In ancient times events were recorded by piles of stones. The children of Israel were commanded to take great stones, and cover them with plaster, and engrave thereon the words of the law (Deut. xxvii.). Similar was the transaction of Israel after passing Jordan. Twelve stones were erected by Joshua in the midst of Jordan, 'for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever' (Josh. iv. 9). The like practice prevails even now in most countries. We commemorate some great event, or incident, by a monument of stone, of marble, or of some other durable material. The Saviour perpetuated the grand confession

of Peter by saying to him, 'Thy name shall be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone.' To the Apostle was thus given, in the language of the text, 'a stone, and a new name,' whereby all future generations might read the terms of the only true faith, the faith that rests on the recognized and confessed Deity of the Son of God. This is the rock of the Church's confidence. Amidst the aboundings of scepticism and the multitudinous forms of unbelief, the Saviour says, with a peculiar emphasis, to every faithful disciple, 'Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith,' 'I will give to thee a white stone.'

'*And in the stone a new name written.*' It would seem from various changes in the names of Old Testament history, made by God Himself, that He has ever attached importance to names, making the name of a person to record some great circumstance or truth. Hence He changed the name of Abram into Abraham: Sarai into Sarah: Jacob into Israel. Perhaps we do not associate sufficient importance to what we call the Christian name of our children. The right of Baptism should carry with it deep and solemn significance to the heart of every thoughtful parent. It should be the outward sign and public acknowledgment that it is a name given in virtue of His name 'that is above every name.' It should be, also, to the child in after years the reminder of the one exclusive mode of salvation—the declaration that there is 'no other name under heaven,

given among men whereby we must be saved.'

A new name preaches to us of a new *relationship.* A child parts with its own name, and takes the name of the family into which it is received as an adopted son or daughter. 'The Lord God shall call His servants by another name.' 'The disciples were called *Christians* first at Antioch:' they assumed His name 'of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.'

This new name is the declaration of *sanctity.* If we are children we should maintain the honour of the family name. 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.' 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' What the Lord said to Ananias concerning 'Saul of Tarsus,' is true of us: we are '*chosen vessels*' to '*bear God's name*' before the world.

Dignity is expressed by a new name. Examples of this are furnished in Joseph, Daniel, and the three Hebrew children. The new names they received were all highly significant of rank and honour. Christianity bestows a name of rank and title that is emphatically 'new'—above the human, above the angelic—*divine.* In Christ we are made 'kings and priests.' With the dignity of a throne is the sanctity of priesthood.

Secrecy belongs to this name. 'A new name *which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*' 'And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnàth-paanèah,' which signifies 'a revealer of secrets,' or 'the man to whom secrets are revealed.' The higher life is a hidden life. Our deepest experiences are not known to others.

It is so with our joys and sorrows alike. The really great sorrows of the soul seldom come to the surface of public gaze. They are profound under-currents that have no outlet in tears or speech. The grief that is seen in tears, or heard in much speech, rarely breaks the heart. So with our joys. Our holiest and grandest emotions are those that stifle utterance. They seal the lips, and make us feel how inadequate are all human vehicles to express heavenly and divine emotions. The pleasures of the worldling lie on the surface—seen by their vulgar show, and heard by the noise they make, like all hollow things. Amidst the glitter, and shows, and sounds of earth, there are souls walking among their fellows with an inward peace that reflects the calm of heaven, and a sacred contentment under all life's changes that reflects the rest of God. Such are living commentaries on the words of the text. They are feeding on 'hidden manna,' and carrying about a 'name' the high import of which none but their own souls and God understand. A name that reveals secrets which belong to *relationship,* and which can be possessed only by those who are *in* the relationship. 'Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have *made known* unto you.'

'You have seen, it may be,' says a writer, 'an antique Italian painted window, with the bright Italian sunshine glowing through it. It is the special excellence

of pictured glass that the light which falls merely on the outside of other pictures, is here interfused throughout the work, illuminating the design, and investing it with a living radiance. . . . Christian faith is a grand cathedral, with divinely pictured windows. Standing without you see no glory, nor can possibly imagine any. Nothing is visible but the merest outline of dusky shapes. Standing within, all is clear and defined, every ray of light reveals a harmony of unspeakable splendours.'

'*To behold the beauty of the Lord*' we must '*inquire in his temple.*' 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall *hide* me in his pavilion: in the *secret* of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.'

The Three Graces.

1 COR. XIII. 13.

Faith, Hope, Charity.

IN the early history of the Christian Church there existed offices and spiritual endowments that have long been obsolete. The gifts of 'tongues,' of 'healing,' of miracle-working, and kindred bestowments, were designed to abide only for a brief season. Hence 'apostles and prophets' have no existence in the modern Church: 'prophecies' have 'failed:' 'tongues' have 'ceased:' knowledge, of a supernatural character, has 'vanished away.' But there are three things that '*abide*,' and will continue so long as time abideth. Two of the three, in a sense, will cease to be when 'time shall be no more,' and the third and greatest of the three return to its native eternity. '*Now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three; but the greatest of these is Charity.*'

Whatever may be the path of our future experience we shall need as much as ever, perhaps more, the 'abiding' sense of the presence and help of this holy and beautiful sisterhood of Christian virtues. Into whatever new scenes and fresh circumstances we shall be called, afflictive or gladdening, our peace and strength must be secured by 'Faith' being in active energy, 'Hope' in fervent glow, and 'Love' burning with a quenchless ardour.

Faith believes what God has promised: Hope anticipates the possession of the promise: Love strengthens Faith and inspires Hope. Faith mounts upward: Hope looks heavenward: Love keeps Faith and Hope in their true positions. Love is the celestial bird; its wings are Faith; its eyes are Hope: Love keeps the wings outspread and the eyes fixed on the sun. We are 'justified by faith;' we 'rejoice in hope;' and 'hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.'

FAITH.

Faith has wings; but unlike the wings that Solomon gives to riches, faith is busy in gathering instead of scattering her treasures. Faith is rich in treasure, because she holds possessions in both hands. With her right hand she takes hold of life, and with the left grasps the promises: 'length of days is in her right hand,' and in her left 'riches and honour;' for 'he

that hath the Son hath life,' and 'through faith we inherit the promises.'

Faith has wings because she is 'a stranger and sojourner' on the earth. Faith has few friends in the world. 'The world knoweth her not.' And no wonder, for there is no family likeness. Faith's eyes are turned upward: the world's eyes are downward, and the two move in separate paths. Therefore Faith is disliked and persecuted. But although without a home here she has a home, and mounting up with the wings of eagles, she lives in a congenial clime, 'seeing him who is invisible.'

This invisibility of Faith's life tends much to the 'trial of faith.' Much in connection with Faith's history is hidden: her path lies through 'clouds and darkness.' It is wisely and graciously so. Were it otherwise, Faith would change her name by being married to sense.

Matthew Henry says, 'We cannot expect too little from man, nor too much from God.' The more we know of man the less faith we shall have in him: consequently our faith in ourselves will weaken as we grow in acquaintance with our own hearts. As respects the higher interests of humanity, man is always proving himself to be a fool in wisdom and a weakling in strength. How can it be otherwise with a mind naturally dark, and a heart naturally corrupt? Development in this case is the development of error and evil.

But in God we can have faith. His wisdom is with-

out the admixture of error: His heart infinitely kind: His power without restraint. Such disparity between the creature and the Creator, between the human and Divine foundations of trust, should lead us to know and obey the double admonition—'Cease ye from *man!*' 'Have faith in GOD!'

HOPE.

Faith has wings, and like the wings of the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision, they are 'full of eyes;' and these eyes are full of sparkling Hope. 'Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' In other words, Hope builds its 'castles,' not 'in the air,' but on the 'substantial' groundwork of Faith. By a strange paradox, the castles built by sense are vapoury visions, while the buildings of faith are substantial and enduring. Hope builds on Faith, and Faith builds on God, '*that our faith and hope may be in God.*'

The Apostle Paul gives us, in few words, a definition of Hope: 'For we are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for? but if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience *wait* for it.' Respecting salvation 'in Christ,' we are 'saved by faith;' respecting glorification with Christ, 'we are saved by hope.' Faith is the child in the house, who knows his filial relationship though the parent is absent. Hope is the child at the

window, expecting the parent's return. Faith is the bride, eyeing not her garment, but the seal of her relation, her ring: Hope is the heart of the wife looking for the yet fuller possessions of wealth and title and honours. The heir of an estate does not hope to be an heir: he *is* one, and knows it by faith in the 'title deeds.' Nevertheless he hopes for possession. Supposing him not to have seen the estates the analogy is complete. The Christian hopes 'for what he sees not.' His title and 'right' he *has* seen by faith in the Divine word: '*Now* are we the sons of God,' but 'it doth not yet appear what we *shall be*.' A prisoner, detained in his cell for some supposable reason, after he had received his pardon, would be saved both by faith and hope: faith in the word that announced his pardon would assure him of salvation: the prospect of release from his prison cell would be his bright hope: at the hour of his departure he would 'receive the *end* of his faith'—full deliverance.

CHARITY.

This word should have been translated *love*. It is thus rendered in the Welsh and French translations of the Greek word, which simply means love. The pre-eminence of this love is described by the Apostle in a very remarkable manner. Let us see wherein it consists.

Love is 'greatest' by reason of its *dignity*. Both faith and hope are *receptive* in their character; but love is *communicative*: therefore is it 'greatest;' for 'it is more blessed to *give* than to receive!' The difference

between Judas and the woman with whom he found fault for breaking her 'costly box of ointment,' was the wide difference between a selfish heart that thought of nothing but receiving, and the loving and grateful heart that thought only of giving. True love can never 'run to waste:' even when it spends itself on the 'desert air' it does not 'waste its sweetness:' it first ascends to heaven as a sweet odour, and then returns to the heart whence it issued, enriched with the breath of angels.

Love is life, delighting to give, and giving to live. We cease to live when we cease to love, and cease to love when we cease to *give*.

Love is 'greatest' by reason of *age*—it is the eldest. Love can say—before faith and hope were 'I am.' It was the flower of Eden, but its first growth was not there, for it was transplanted from the garden of heaven, and blossomed in the bosom of God 'from everlasting.' Love is the true Melchisedek, 'without beginning of days or end of years.' The two great active attributes of the Divine moral nature are 'love' and 'wrath:' the one is without beginning: the other was born of that which is contrary to love. Moreover, love has provided a 'lightning conductor' for the fire of wrath. Love then must be both the eldest and strongest. Hence—

Love is 'greatest' by reason of its *strength*. 'Love

is strong as death.' How firm a hold does death take of its captives! This aspect of love has several relations.

There is God's love to us. When we see this we are taken captive by love at its will. It is a power magnetic. We love because first loved. Some hearts that are too hard to be broken by the hammer of truth, and the strokes of judgments, quickly yield to the sweet influences of love. The sun's gentle beams will achieve what heavy blows fail to do—'rend' the ice-bound heart 'in pieces.'

There is our love to God. How weak, alas! the measure of it; but how potent its quality! No motive *for* service can be compared with it; nor anything *in* service sustain like it. The '*work* of faith' and the '*patience* of hope' are sustained by the '*labour* of love.' Faith may grow weak in work; and hope weary in waiting; but love 'fainteth not, neither is weary.' 'Love will creep in service where it cannot go.'

Hence our power with men. As God 'commendeth His love to us' by His love; and we by love commend our service to God; so must we commend ourselves to men. Love makes us kingly, and hearts are ever ready to do homage to all who rule with love's sceptre. There is no rule like it: 'no cord or cable can draw so forcibly, or bind so fast, as love can do with only a single thread.' Love seeks to hide faults: it hides the faults of others from our eyes, and our faults from the eyes of others. Love covers a multitude of sins. 'When a scar cannot be taken away, the next kind office is to hide it.'

Love is 'greatest' by reason of its *duration.* It is 'to everlasting' as well as 'from everlasting.' '*Love never faileth.*' Its pulsations will never cease: its vestal fires never go out. Having conducted 'Love' to the gate of heaven, 'Faith and Hope' will receive a fresh baptism, and be thenceforth known by the names of *sight* and *fruition.*

Faith is the *hand;* Hope is the *eye;* Love is the *heart.* The hand receives; the eye looks for that which is to follow; the heart returns thanks, in words and deeds.

Zaccheus.

LUKE XIX. 6.

And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.

N this record we have a whole multitude following Jesus, but one particular personage as the leading thought; and he the most unlikely of all the throng, according to human judgment, to be selected by Christ to receive His special attentions. But He who is the chief among saints delights to select the chief among sinners in order to display His choice attribute of mercy. The incident teaches us several lessons:—

The fame of Jesus was at this time spreading widely, and attracting general attention. Zaccheus hears of it. Perhaps he was now and then told by some of the many victims of his sinful extortions, that his actions were very unlike those reported of One who was everywhere making Himself known and loved as a man of mercy.

His curiosity is excited, und probably from no other impulse he determines to join the crowd, on hearing that Jesus was 'passing through Jericho.'

Now, look at that crowd—men, women, and children, all *interested*, in some way or other, *about Jesus*. How true a picture of the so-called religious world! Look at the multitudes on a Sabbath thronging and 'pressing' through the busy streets of some populous city. What is leading so many of them to the sanctuary? It is the *fame* of Jesus. But for that name they would be bending their steps to the shrine of some idol-deity. But what are the motives that are leading this multitude to the House of God? Who can tell? He only who 'searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men.' And to His eye what anomalies do religious assemblies sometimes appear! Here are to be found 'the true worshippers,' but with them the formalists, the hypocrites, and sinners of every grade. Here are the devotees of fashion, the fleshly embodiments of pride and vanity. Here are 'the lovers of pleasure,' who in an emphatic sense 'love darkness rather than light,' sleeping away the bright hours of God's sunshine, and dancing away the sweet and holy hours of night, in which God 'giveth his beloved sleep.' Here are the worshippers of gold, responding to the commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' Here are blasphemers, responding to the commandment, 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.' Here are the Sabbath-breakers, responding to the com-

mandment, 'Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy.' Here are children with no reverence and obedience for parents, responding to the commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother.' Here are moral murderers, who first destroy the virtue and then the happiness of the victims of their lust, responding to the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill.' Here are adulterers, responding to the commandment, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' Here are the dishonest, and the 'extortioners,' and the 'unjust,' like Zaccheus, responding to the commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal.' Here are the 'evil speakers,' and 'liars,' responding to the commandment, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' Here are the 'covetous,' responding to the commandment, 'Thou shalt not covet.' Here are the misers, hypocritically thanking God for the wide diffusion and plenitude of His gifts; the proud and the vain praying for humility; the wrathful seeking mercy; and the resentful and implacable saying two or three times within the hour, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.'

O God, 'the multitudes throng thee and press thee' in thy sanctuary! But how few, how very few, touch thee by a living faith, and extract from Thy presence Thy healing virtue!

We lose ourselves in the crowd. We measure ourselves by others: their creed is our creed: their opinions ours. Our sympathies and conduct run in the rut of our fellows. We are as good as our religious

neighbours, and are therefore morally very respectable. We are of the crowd, and the crowd is very earnestly engaged in crying, 'Hosannah!'

This was the spirit that so thoroughly took hold of the Jews. They were identified with a whole religious 'race.' They were 'of the stock of Israel,' the 'children of Abraham,' had an illustrious ancestry, and were promised a noble tribe of descendants. Their Sabbaths, and synagogues, and festivals, were standing memorials of their being identified with religion. They worshipped the true God, read the Scriptures of truth, believed in the coming of the only true Messiah. Whenever they met on the Sabbath they did two things—confessed themselves sinners, and joined in the praises of One who should come to 'save his people from their sins.' But when away from the Sanctuary, and religion was presented to them as a personal question, they practically denied what elsewhere they believed: then they were not 'sinners,' nor were they prepared to 'receive' the Saviour 'joyfully.'

All this was signally proved on the occasion which furnishes our subject. They were angry because Jesus went to the house of Zaccheus to be his guest, to the house of one who was a 'sinner.' Hence the rebuke of Jesus, 'He also is a son of Abraham.' If 'a son of Abraham,' and a 'sinner,' then the sons of Abraham needed a Saviour. Did they not professedly believe this? Yes, they did as a truth belonging to a religious creed and a religious system, a truth which they ac-

knowleged when among the multitude; but not as a heart belief and a personal question.

These Jews have transmitted their character to all succeeding generations. 'God be merciful to us miserable sinners' is a religious formulary uttered by thousands among a multitude, who away from the sanctuary and on any other day than the Sabbath would be greatly offended with any 'man of God' who should, under a sense of duty, remind them that they were what they had, with others, acknowledged themselves to be—'miserable sinners.' Or if they did not deny the charge as a personal thing, they would probably shelter themselves from the heartfelt conviction of it by again reminding the lips of faithfulness that they were as good as others.

To avoid these inconsistencies and deceptions, we must do in a spiritual sense what Zaccheus did literally —separate ourselves from the multitude, and stand before God under the deep and solemn sense of our personal sinfulness and responsibilities. There is a wrong and a right way of doing this.

The wrong way. Zaccheus took refuge among the branches and leaves of a 'sycamore tree' before he found shelter in the 'Rock of ages.' The tree embraced him before the arms of Christ. His conduct is deeply significant. How many, under the overwhelming conviction of their personal sinfulness, 'run' not from the crowd only, but from Christ. Instead of following,

in the spirit of obedience, the precepts and commands of the Saviour, they 'run before,' and 'climb' some tree of self-dependence. They are sensible of the fact that they are 'short of stature.' The 'law' has taught them this, and in the light of the 'gospel' they have proved the fact to a painful demonstration. As in a mirror they now see that they have '*come short of the glory of God.*' Consequently they begin some expedient to give them a moral elevation—they begin to 'take thought' that they may '*add*' to their righteousness. But 'who by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?' It cannot be done naturally: much less spiritually. No! And from all such attempts we should '*make haste and come down.*'

The right way is to 'come down' from every high thought of self and simply 'receive' Christ as the guest of our hearts. In contact with Him we shall see clearly what we could not see among the crowd, or among the blinding foliage of the 'sycamore tree.' In fellowship with Him our own stature will be forgotten, our own 'shortcomings' lost sight of. And when 'seated together' in holy and blessed converse, we shall rejoice that 'what the law could not do,' and what no human effort could do, He has done for us who has '*raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places.*'

Zaccheus '*made haste* and came down.' He did not hesitate on the ground of his own unworthiness. He

was made to feel that he could not make himself better by refusing to obey the voice of grace. The light which revealed him to himself also revealed the marvellous grace and tenderness of Jesus, and in that light he was not afraid to commit himself to such a friend. He was *where* he was through a desire 'to see Jesus;' and the sight had made him what he now was—a 'broken and a contrite' penitent in company with his Saviour. He came to *see* with the eye of flesh: he went away seeing with the eye of faith—a true 'son of Abraham,' a participant of Abraham's joy, who 'saw the day of Christ afar off, and was glad.'

Observe the double effect of this reception.

An *inward* effect. He '*received him joyfully.*' With the joy of Abraham; of the 'wise men,' who when they saw the star that perfected Abraham's faith 'rejoiced with exceeding great joy;' and of aged Simeon, who when he held in his withered arms the living font of the world's gladness, found the consummation of his joy, and said—'*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*' Zaccheus never knew what real joy was till he took Jesus to his house—the home of his heart being to the Saviour's presence the ante-room to the home of his house. How many houses but how few homes does this world contain!

Home is where the heart is, and the heart without Jesus as the guest is *a house without a home!*

An *outward* effect. '*And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*' He could say with Job, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' Contact with Jesus is *light*, and the light makes manifest the hidden things of darkness. Darkness cannot stand before the light. Impurity cannot live in the presence of Holiness. Selfishness cannot exist before Love. The realized presence of God is the death-blow to everything contrary to the nature of God.

The Divine Verdict.

GENESIS I. 4.

'And God saw the light, that it was good.'

HE earth was '*without form*.' So is that piece of moral creation which has been significantly called 'a world within a world.' Man was made 'in the image of God.' This was his distinguishing glory. But 'the glory is departed.' When we think of the manifold purposes of degradation and mountebankism to which the dignity of human life is perverted, we may well ask the question, 'Whose image and superscription is this?' The coin has fallen into bad hands. The image is obliterated, and the inscription effaced. Satan has been at work here; he has 'turned the truth of God into a lie.' Alas, for the grey shadow of what was once a man! The soul has lost its glory. It is without its divine 'form.'

It is also '*void*'—empty—'vanity.' This is the

cause of the departed glory. The house is without its furniture; the palace without its king; the temple without its God. It is the soul that imparts to man his true greatness. What is the most perfectly formed body tenanted by a maniac? The lethargic step and blank expression declare that the glory is gone. Sin is the 'strong man armed.' It is a great 'spoiler.' Into whatever soul-house it comes, it enters to 'spoil the goods'—to take light from the understanding, love from the heart, peace from the conscience, loyalty from the will; and to make the body, that should be a temple of beauty and of praise, into an instrument of lust. The soul-house is empty. The Creator looks upon it, and draws near to see if He can find any traces of loveliness belonging to His late residence; but so long as sin holds possession the Divine verdict remains the same —'*void.*' Sometimes the house is 'swept and garnished;' but this does not alter the verdict with Him who sees the corruption beneath the semblance of life and beauty.

The first thing the Spirit of God does is to give '*light.*' '*Let there be light.*' He 'who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'

This light does two things:—

It reveals the moral *chaos.* The darkness that was upon the face thereof is dispersed. What startling dis-

closures are made to the eye of the sinner when the Spirit of God moves about his darkness and corruption! What hidden things of darkness are brought to light! The light makes manifest that he is not what he thought himself to be. He now sees that he could not see before because the darkness had blinded his eyes. Now that the light has entered he exclaims—*'I am vile!*

But this light reveals *beauty* as well as deformity—what is very 'good' as well as what is very bad. Human imperfection is seen in the light of the perfections of God. Christ takes possession of the empty house, brings His 'form' of beauty to its unsightliness, and His 'fulness' to its emptiness. With this Divine occupant a '*new creation*' is effected. 'Old things pass away, and all things become new.' This satisfies the heart of the Father. He sees that it is '*good*'—very good. The peace of the soul is secured when the heart *rests* in this Divine verdict. Thus fellowship with God is restored: for where Christ is God can come. So we have 'fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.'

'And God *divided* the light from the darkness; and God called the light day, and the darkness he called night.' With all the natural darkness that lingers about us as Christians, God has graciously *divided* light from darkness. In His sight we *are* light. '*Ye are light in the Lord.*' Practically, therefore, we should seek to illustrate the consistency of the names which are given to

us. As children of the 'day' and not of the 'night,' we should walk as children of 'light.' 'Ye are all the children of the light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.'

This division constitutes a moral '*firmament.*' It is analogous to the 'Jordan' that separated Canaan and the wilderness. We are put in 'heavenly places,' '*risen* with Christ,' lifted to a spiritual sphere, to move around the great central sun, and to *reflect* its light and beauty—to be for '*lights in the firmament of the heaven, to give light upon the earth.*'

Hence we have illustrated—

THE CHURCH'S RELATION TO CHRIST.

'*And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth. And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.*' The 'greater light' is to 'rule the day.' The 'children of the light' are to find their 'light and life' in the ruling spirit of Him who is the Sun of the heavenly firmament.

We shine in borrowed light, and should be in all things '*ruled*' by it. Were the planets to refuse to be ruled by the greater light, the sun, they would become 'wandering stars.' This is what we sometimes do; for which reason we 'walk in darkness, and see no light.'

To have the light at all times we must 'stay ourselves upon our God.' We should resemble the Apocalyptic angel—'*standing in the Sun.*'

Thus we should illustrate—

THE CHURCH'S RELATION TO THE WORLD.

'*The lesser light to rule the night.*' The children of night should be made to feel the moral 'rule' of the children of the day. Christians, where is your *ruling* power? Ruling power is *superior* power—not going down to the level of others, but bringing others up to your level. When God sees us thus ruling in the world He will apply the verdict to *our* work as well as to the works of creation and of redemption—'*it is good.*' We shall then be '*for signs and for seasons*'—the objects of attraction and centres of vital influence. The spiritual 'heavens' will 'declare the glory of God.' The light will exert its genial and fructifying influence; and every act of life will be precious fruit—a 'sign' of heavenly power, grateful and 'seasonable.'

'Almost.'

ACTS XXVI. 28.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

HILOSOPHERS tell us of two great forces in nature, the one attractive, the other repellent. This law affords us an illustration in the case of Agrippa. Agrippa was 'almost' persuaded to be a Christian—here was an influence for good. But he was *only* almost persuaded—here was a disposition that implies a power for evil. Truth and error were in conflict. Two worlds were at strife—heaven stooping to give life: hell in commotion seeking to intercept the gift.

King Agrippa was now in contact with the power of Truth. Paul, when accused by Festus of insanity, made his defence in the bold yet reverent words, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of

Truth.' The apostle was uttering no mere strains of human oratory, but delivering a divine message: he was not dealing in simple imagery, whereby to captivate and terrify the senses, but relating actual transactions. Not fabulous tales, but accredited, and solemn, and recent history—not fiction, but Truth, was the burthen of his discourse—that which made his eloquence kindle such inspiration, and burn its way into the core of the heart. It was truth of the highest order, appealing to the testimony of conscience, and highly attested.

It was truth of supreme value. The gospel is not only power, but power of the highest worth. 'Knowledge is power;' but power is of two kinds. 'The tree of knowledge' is of '*good and evil fruit.*' Knowledge may be converted into a power for serious mischief: that it has been thus perverted, and still is, both history and experience prove to a fearful demonstration. Some of the mightiest forces are the most destructive. We are reminded of this in the lightning's fire and thunder's rolling; in the surging sea, and winds which no man can tame; in the lion's roar, and the serpent's death-rattle. But the gospel is the most *beneficent* power. It is an omnipotent agency, and an infinite good. It is the greatest of all powers, because 'the power of God;' it is the greatest of all blessings, because 'the power of God unto salvation.'

It is so because of its sublime purposes. All truth is of value inasmuch as God is the author and centre of

all truth. He is emphatically 'The Truth.' Wheresoever truth is found, whether in science, art, literature, or morals, there we have the emanations of its great source. Above the porch of the temple of truth is inscribed the motto—'No man can enter herein, except the truth draw him.' But while having a common author, truth has not a uniform object. Its value is relative, according to its aim and end. Secular truth is of value in developing the powers of the soul; in storing the mind with needful information; in opening varied stores of rich and refined gratification; in improving man's state of civilization, and social influence, and domestic comfort. In these and other respects we see the worth of truth for material and temporal purposes. This is the limit of its power. It cannot extend its influence beyond time, to that higher state, and those eternal scenes, to which this life is but the introduction. That instrumentality, therefore, is of supreme importance whose object is the salvation of the soul, and preparation for immortality. To restore a crushed and faded flower would be a work of comparative unimportance, were it practicable; but to arrest the devastating course of a falling star, and rescue it from the 'blackness of darkness,' would be a work worthy of omnipotence, and of Divine benevolence. All that the secular can do is to cultivate the *human*, to develop into beauty and fragrance in the sight of man a fading flower. The truth of the gospel has to do with the divine and the immortal, makes the soul inquire after its celestial origin, and

ponder its eternal destinies, turning the eye from earth to heaven, where it may shine for ever filled with light and love, the light and love of God Himself—the soul's great central Sun of rest and glory.

Such is the power of the gospel, as an instrumentality. It is, indeed, 'the power of God.' Here, in the loftiest sense, 'Knowledge is Power.' It is the knowledge that saves—the power that belongeth only to God. Such was the knowledge, so new, so startlingly sublime, which the great apostle presented to his august hearer. Need we wonder at the stirring words of confession as the soul of the king felt the power of the truth, and quivered under the mingled emotions of conscious personal responsibility and awful majesty. He was 'almost persuaded' to be Truth's willing captive. Nor have the solemn tones of his faltering voice been altogether spent by the lapse of eighteen hundred years. In the minds of all men, when appealed to by the messenger of the gospel, and heart-stricken by the power of the truth, there are still to be heard the reverberations of the memorable words—'*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*'

It was truth confirmed by the testimony of conscience. In replying to the calumny of Festus, Paul affirmed of the statements he was making, that they were 'words of truth and soberness.' They were marked by reasonableness. As such they appealed to the testimony of conscience.

The gospel is heaven's great moral argument; and God has sent with it a divine vicegerent. The strongest witness in the cause of truth, and the mightiest of all logicians, is conscience. It needs no second court of appeal; at its own tribunal, enthroned itself as judge, it pronounces self-condemnation, appending the solemn 'Amen' to every righteous verdict. Hence the power wielded by the apostle before Agrippa. The truth he was uttering was a divine argument, needing only faithful and earnest enunciation, and immediately, either voluntarily or involuntarily, it awoke the potent voice within, 'commending itself to the conscience in the sight of God.'

And since the days of Paul this grand argument has lost none of its efficacy. Like its author, it abides unchanged and unchangeable through all time, 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.' Whenever and wheresoever Christ's ambassadors publish the great syllogism, though received by few with the consent of the heart, it is rarely—by the obstinately wicked only—expelled from the mind as a religious fabrication. Its premises are too clear and self-evident, and its conclusions too divinely rational, for the conscience to refuse its instant and corroborating testimony.

My brother, am I not uttering words of 'truth and soberness'? Does not thy conscience confirm my message? In all you have read and heard of the Christian economy, and in all your candid and serious consideration of it, is not the mind held captive although the

heart be not 'persuaded'? In the 'types and shadows' of the Levitical law,—in all that patriarchs divinely did, and prophets divinely said,—in the great 'mystery of godliness' that runs, like a thread of golden light, through the whole range of biblical truth,—in the importance which is universally attached to the question of human salvation,—in the consideration of the mighty love of God, seen not alone at Calvary, but also in its wide-spread diffusion over creation, garnishing it with beauty, and supplying it with bounty,—in the deep-seated conviction that this beneficent Creator demands and deserves the highest loyalty of your best affections,—in the insatiable thirst for happiness which has so long been sought for in vain apart from God,—in such accumulated appeals, do not all things conspire to prove that it is the most reasonable of all duties, the soberest of all decisions, to become the disciples of truth and followers of God? Does not the unanimous voice of Nature, Revelation, and Redemption evoke from conscience the unhesitating response, '*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian?*'

It was paramount truth attested by the testimony of facts. It has been said that 'facts are stronger than arguments.' A solitary fact may utterly confound a thousand plausible arguments. In unnumbered instances its testimony has proved a most valuable auxiliary to the statements of truth.

The grand argument of the gospel is based on great facts. These facts are, as condensed by the apostle in

the context, the *sufferings* and the *resurrection* of Christ, 'that Christ died, and that he rose again.' And these facts have been well attested. Christ, after His resurrection, 'was seen of Cephas;' afterwards 'of the twelve;' then again 'of five hundred brethren;' and lastly of Paul himself. As a Jew Agrippa acknowledged the divine authority of the prophets. Moreover, these facts were well known to him, both by their extensive circulation and the intimate association of Christ's history and the family of the Herods. His conscience was fully prepared to attest the reality of the truths he was hearing from Paul. Hence the significance of the apostle's words —'For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.'

Christianity appeals to us by a wide range of facts. The accumulated testimony of eighteen centuries meets in one strong argument in favour of it. The religion of Jesus is not a fable palmed upon the credulous and weak-minded by a number of religious impostors. It is an intensely solemn and stupendous fact. Its whole history, from the eve that ushered in Bethlehem's star to the present hour, attests it. It is attested in its miraculous preservation from the wrath of impious zealots and the blasphemies of hardened atheists. It is attested in the magnificent faith of 'the noble army of martyrs,' who counted not their lives dear

so that they might 'win Christ.' It is attested in 'the fulfilment of prophecy,' and in the investigations of science. It is attested in its wondrous adaptations to the wants of humanity in every age and under all circumstances. It has, in countless instances, been a grand compensation for the loss of wealth, and a glorious substitute for the wreck of health; and thus it has been attested. It has proved a power to turn the darkest and densest cloud of woe into a robe of light, and 'the night of weeping' into the 'morning of joy,' and thus it has been attested. For all who have embraced it, it has made life a substantial pleasure, and death an unspeakable privilege, transforming the chamber of mortality into the vestibule of glory, and the grave into the ante-room of heaven; and thus it has been attested. Yes, do I not address some child of God who is well prepared thus to attest the reality of Christ's religion? And do I not speak to some undecided one, from whose conscience the truth has often extorted the confession of Agrippa?

> 'The chamber where the good man meets his fate
> Is privileged beyond the common walk of life,
> Quite on the verge of heaven.'

Such a chamber you have been privileged to enter. As you stood by the bed-side of a sainted parent, or pious sister, or beloved friend, you saw 'a mortal paleness on the cheek,' but glory was flashing from the soul; and retiring from the hallowed scene, already redolent with

the atmosphere of heaven, you were heard to say, perhaps involuntarily, '*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*'

We have thus contemplated three great aspects of divine truth, which may be regarded as forming conclusive evidence of the supreme importance of personal Christianity, and calculated to '*persuade*' the soul into Christ. But how is it that this truth so often fails to effect its true end? Because the *heart* as well as the mind needs to be persuaded. Religious decision is founded on a two-fold power—power with the conscience, through the intellect, and power with the will, through the heart. The truth was successful with Agrippa's intellect and conscience, but the opposition of his will rendered the work of conversion incomplete. Hence he was only 'almost' persuaded. There was the assent of the understanding without the consent of the affections. Inclination was at war with judgment. Alas, how great is the number who are intellectually convinced of the claims of truth, but who become truth's castaways, because they refuse to yield the confidence of their hearts!

'"Almost!"—and was this all, thou Jewish prince,
Thou listener to the ambassador of heaven?
Almost persuaded! ah, hadst thou exchanged
Thy trappings and thy purple for his bonds
Who stood before thee—hadst thou drawn his hope
Into thy bosom, even with the spear

Of martyrdom, how great had been thy gain!
And ye who linger while the call of God
Bears witness with your conscience,
. . . . . beware! beware!
Lest that dread "almost" shut you out from heaven.'

'Go up Higher!'

LUKE XIV. 10.

But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

HERE is a rabbinical parable which runs somewhat thus: Three men were bidden to a feast. One of them was a prince, and took the highest seat. Another seated himself next to the prince because he was a wise man. The third took the lowest place being consciously lowly. The king, observing all this, reversed the order, and put the humble man in the place of the prince.

The character and mission of Jesus, when on earth, clothed this parable with a sublime significance. 'He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant: he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God hath *highly exalted* him, and given him a name which is above every name.'

These moral beauties of the Redeemer's character, so attractive in the sight of heaven, were 'an offence' to the Jews, particularly to the 'scribes and Pharisees.' The light was so pure that shone around His path, that diseased eyes could not endure it. They 'loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.' His humility, and tender affections, and childlike graces, were so contrary to their pride, and arrogance, and selfishness, that a great moral gulf intervened between the sympathies of Christ and theirs. Hence they 'esteemed him not.' He was 'as a root out of a dry ground, having no form nor comeliness.' They looked for the advent of a king attended with all the outward and visible signs of power and pomp—crowned, throned, and sceptred. But behold 'a man of sorrows'—one who knew what it was to be 'wearied with his journey'—sometimes 'an hungred'—having no certain dwelling 'where he could lay his head.' They looked for one who should appear to claim and possess '*the highest*' place, and behold he takes the '*lowest*.'

The parable, in its primary application, is a strong rebuke to the 'lofty looks' and unbelieving hearts of the 'scribes and Pharisees.' Its moral is: 'Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.' It may be expressed in few words: *Take your true place, and God will say—'Go up higher.'*

1. The tendency of the human heart is to take a false position before God. We put ourselves into the relationship of *children* before we have been made such. Sin has made those who were once children '*aliens*.' The law of sin is 'the law of separation.' It 'drove out' the child 'from the presence' of the Divine Father. One hand only can lead the wanderer back to the family circle. It is the hand of Christ. That hand can be grasped only by the touch of faith. Nor will faith ever stretch forth its hand to 'lay hold on eternal life' until that life is felt to be the most important of all possessions. The whole need not a physician. The saved need not a Saviour. The living need not seek for life. The righteous 'need no repentance.' So long as the Syrophenician woman claimed a relationship that did not belong to her, a relation with Abraham, she found no blessing. When she acknowledged her true character as 'an alien from the commonwealth of Israel,' felt herself a 'stranger' to covenant promises, and took the 'lowest' place—then did she find what she sought for, and ascended the lofty eminence of a noble faith. She humbled herself to take the '*dog's*' place, and in so doing was exalted to the '*child's*' place. She asked for 'crumbs' and was fed 'with the finest of the wheat.' Let us come to God with *our* righteousness, and He will send us away with *our own* rights only. Let us come poor, and He will enrich us. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' In 'having nothing' they are made to possess 'all things.' With joy do they draw water from 'the

wells of salvation,' and find an abundant supply. Their vessels are filled because they were first emptied. Let us take the beggar's place, and the Master will give both food and change of raiment, and adopt us as His children. We shall hear Him say—'Take what you want and go up higher.' And lifted out of self into Christ—from the quicksands of sin into the cleft of the 'Rock of Ages'—the heart will thankfully and joyfully respond, 'Thy righteousness, O God, is *very high*.'

2. There is a second application of the text, closely related with the first. We may fail in refusing to take the place of children after it has been given to us. We may be standing outside the family after we have been brought into it—calling ourselves 'hired servants,' when the Father's kiss has warmed our cheek, and His hand seated us at His own table. We may be busying ourselves more with our torn and ragged dress of human obedience than with the 'best robe' wherewith the Father has clothed us. We may be cutting ourselves with stones by leaving at home our sandals—forgetting to have our feet 'shod with the preparation of the gospel of *peace*.' When conscious of our wanderings, like the Prodigal, we are ready to confess that we are 'no more worthy to be called' according to the relationship of sons—forgetting that the relation of a child to his parent is independent of personal worth. If the relationship is dishonoured it calls out parental grace, as it should do filial repentance and renewed obedience.

The true position of the offending child is not to be keeping away from the Father's smile under the remorseful consciousness of much unworthiness. 'If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' God does with our sins what He did with the plains of Sodom—they are doomed from His presence. He hides His face from our sins that it may shine into our hearts. Let us take heed of repeating the sin of 'Lot's wife'—'lingering' about the suburbs of death. Let the dead bury the dead. You have to do with life, not with death. Leave the 'dead past,' and follow Him who offers His hand that He may conduct you to 'quiet resting-places.' Stay not gazing into the grave of your broken vows and gloomy remembrances. Jesus, with His breath of peace, is not there. He is 'on high'—seated at the right hand of the Father, to make for you perpetual intercession. His blood has cleansed you, and His priestly intercession keeps you clean. Let not failures unduly discourage. 'Life, like war, is a series of mistakes, and he is not the best Christian nor the best general who makes the fewest false steps; poor mediocrity may secure that; but he is the best who wins the most splendid victories by the retrieval of mistakes. Forget mistakes: organize victory out of mistakes, and make them stepping-stones to a diviner life—altar-stairs whereon to '*go up higher*.'

3. This introduces a third application of the text—

the importance of *a higher spiritual life.* In other words, soul-life should develop itself in growth and progress. The development of spiritual life should not be rebuked by the lower sphere of life. The body grows, from infantile weakness to robust strength. The mind grows, from a little empty chamber to wisdom's ample storehouse. The plant grows, from the tender sapling to the sturdy tree of centuries. Shall the divinest form of life be of tardiest growth? Earth hath its hidden treasures that we may dig for more. The sea hath its buried pearls that we may dive for more. The heavens have their unnamed and unseen stars that we may explore for more. There lies an unmeasured boundary beyond earth's horizon that nothing earthly may satisfy. 'Hence our dissatisfaction with all that is or can be done. There never was the beauty yet than which we could not conceive something more beautiful. None so good as to be faultless in our eyes. No deed done by us but we feel we have it in us to do a better. Therefore to never rest is the price paid for our greatness. Could we rest, we must become smaller in soul. Whoever is satisfied with what he does has reached his culminating point—he will progress no more.'

The soul's motto should be—'*Always abounding.*' The prize is 'on high'—it is the prize of 'our high calling.' We have not yet 'attained' the 'mark' that measures the practical character of 'a perfect man in Christ Jesus.' Look upward! Go forward! 'Press towards the mark!' 'Doth the eagle mount up and make his nest on high?'

'Firm on his own mountain vigour relying,
Breasting the dark storms, the red bolt defying;
His wing on the wind, and his eye on the sun,
He swerves not a hair, but bears onward, right on.'

Christian, 'let the eagle's flight be thine—onward, and upward, and true to the line'—'from strength to strength!' *Higher and higher!*

4. Apply the text to the right use and regulation of our *affections*. The Creator has not left it an open question as to whether it is a right or wrong thing to love. Our own natures give the answer, and God's Word ratifies its truthfulness. We were made with great clinging affections and outgoing sympathies. The question is not *may* I love? but *what* may I love, and *how?* It is, shall I *crawl* or *climb?* Shall I wallow in the mire, or soar like the imperial bird? You may let your affections go out after everything that reflects the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator. Do not be afraid to love whatever is lovely and loveable. You may love kindred and friends, 'sun and moon, and stars of light,' majestic seas and noble rivers, 'mountains and hills,' 'the flowers of the field,' 'fruitful trees and all cedars,' 'beasts and all cattle,' 'creeping things and flying fowl,' 'both young men and maidens, old men and children.' These all declare the 'praise' of Him whose 'name alone is excellent,' and the excellence of whose name is reflected in the manifold works of His hand, and the manifold sources which He has provided for the happiness of His creatures.

But take heed *how* you love. Love for the creature must not be divorced from the Creator. Neither must it be a love which in the hour of bereavement leaves the heart like an empty well; for that would be idolatrous, carrying with it only the bitterness of disappointment.

Supreme affections should be set 'on things above, not on things on the earth.' Build your nest on no earthly tree, but let it be on high, unexposed to the wind and tempest. Lay up treasure in heaven, and be 'rich toward God.' This will establish the heart in rest, and furnish a constant and unfailing source of comfort. While others who are living 'without hope and without God,' are seen sitting and weeping by their 'broken cisterns,' you shall be refreshing yourself with the 'living water' of which he that drinks shall live for ever. This 'well,' which is better than that of 'our father Jacob,' supplies a perennial stream. In time of drought it is still the same. Health may fail, but here is strength. Friends may fail, but here is a friend unchanging. Wealth may fail, but here is treasure that corrodes not. Life itself may fail, but here is 'life and immortality.' All the foundations of human joy and of earthly security may give way beneath your feet like shifting sand, but amidst the dire ruin the peaceful brow shall be erect, and the song issue from the lips—

'*Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.*'

Not many years ago a Christian traveller stood on a rocky eminence in Switzerland, on one of two mountain ridges. He heard the roll of thunder, and looking

into the valley saw that a storm was raging. But above him the sun was shining, and a serene sky looking down in its cloudless beauty. The position threw around his spirit a calm and holy atmosphere, which the vicinity of the tempest could not disturb. And while he stood he mused thus:

'I stand upon the mount of God,
With sunlight in my soul;
I see the storm in vales beneath,
I hear the thunder's roll.

'But I am calm with Thee, my God,
Beneath these glorious skies,
And to the height on which I stand
Nor storms nor clouds can rise.

'O this is life! O this is joy!
My God, to find Thee so;
Thy face to see, Thy voice to hear,
And all Thy love to know.'

'I will set him on high, because he hath known my name! I will be with him in trouble.'

5. All God's dealings with us is to lift us higher. Made up of no fortuitous events is the believer's life and history, but moulded and regulated by the Divine hand, and stamped in every particular by unerring wisdom and matchless love. Chance and accident are words unknown to Him who made and governs the world, and should be unknown to those who are His acknowledged subjects. To human reason life may be a lottery,

with few prizes and many blanks; but the child of faith is assured that while 'the lot is cast into the lap, the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.' To the Christian life has no blanks, save those which to his own shame are self-creations. His life and history may often remind him of 'wheel within wheel' of mystery; but he knows that every wheel is, in a sublime sense, a 'wheel of fortune,' turning the most adverse influences into divine ministries of grace, working out the soul's good, and the glory of God.

Every circumstance in life's changeful and eventful history is to train and discipline the soul for the divinest service on earth, and the loftiest employments of heaven. Life is a school: the scholars pass through a graduated course, and all lessons God would have us so learn that they may be turned into 'songs of degrees,' till the last earthly degree is taken, and the highest honour is awarded, and the soul hears in the message of death the Father's voice, saying—'GO UP HIGHER!'

'Lifted higher' were the words which a widowed mother inscribed on the tombstone of an only daughter, as if to register thereby her own as well as her child's promotion. A few days ago a young lady 'fell asleep,' and declared how soft and balmy may be the last as well as the first sleep, in making her departing breath musical with the words—'HIGHER! HIGHER!' She had caught the whisperings of the angels, and echoing back their Excelsior, her response was audible.

The Divine Autograph.

2 COR. III. 2, 3.

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

ERY beautifully does the spirit of the apostle unfold itself here. With his characteristic humility he is found repeating himself in order to qualify a statement which might be regarded as betraying self-glorying. On one occasion we hear him saying, '*I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.*' So here—'Ye are *our* epistles;' and immediately he adds, as if to correct the statement,—'Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ *ministered by us!*' With all the honour that God had put upon him, and with all the success that had attended his course, he felt that he was but a 'minister,' only an

amanuensis—a mere pen in the hand of the great 'ready-writer.' Instrumentally he had written many epistles, not on parchment alone, but on the 'fleshy tables' of hearts; but he would not forget that every page, every sentence, every word, had first originated from, and been indited by, '*The Spirit of the living God.*'

What the law could not do, and what man could not do by the law, Christ has done. He has 'obeyed the law, and made it honourable.' Every letter and line of the divine copy He has accurately followed, and in every thought, word, and act, made Himself its living transcription. 'The man Christ Jesus' was the Father's great living epistle 'known and read of all men,' and proved to be what He declared Himself, 'without sin,' 'holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.' His enemies being judges.

Christ is 'God's 'epistle,' and we are 'the epistle of Christ.' We are made 'partakers of the divine nature,' have received of His Spirit, and are called by His name. He is 'made unto us of God,' our perfection. The poor, blurred, and clumsy writing which man attempted to offer to please the Divine eye, He has 'blotted out.' It was the 'handwriting' that was 'against us:' so He has 'taken it away,' and 'nailed it to the cross;' and in its stead He has inserted His own name. And now He says, 'Follow me,' 'be ye imitators of God as dear children,' let the handwriting that has been imprinted on

the 'fleshy tables' of your hearts by the Spirit of the living God stand out in bold and beautiful transparency, —let your Christian character be all of one piece, a thing of harmony and consistency, like Ezekiel's roll, 'written within and without,'—seek to remember at all times that ye are not *your own* epistles but the 'epistle' of *Christ*, attracting the gaze of the world; be 'faithful;' be not found 'false witnesses;' walk worthy of your high vocation, and 'if it be possible, as much as lieth in you,' allow not the finger of the scoffer to refer to any word, or course of conduct, to rebuke you, saying, '*That is not the handwriting of Christ.*'

'*Known and read of all men.*' The object of letter-writing is that the letter may be read. A candle is not lit 'to be put under a bushel, or under a bed,' but to distribute its light throughout the room. Neither is a letter written to be sealed and deposited in some dark drawer, but to travel to its appointed destination, where its contents will be 'known and read.' Christian character is moral writing, and must make itself manifest. We might as well try to arrest the chariot-wheels of the sun; to intercept its golden beams; to bid the 'four winds of heaven' cease to blow; to command the clouds that they empty not themselves on the earth; as to attempt to avoid the development of ourselves to the sight of others. Voluntarily or involuntarily, seriously or thoughtlessly, we are continually being made a 'spectacle' to God, to angels, and to man!

This influence is often greatest when most *silent*. The writer retires from the noise of company, shuts his chamber door, and there in solitude pens his epistle. There is no noise. The letter is written, sealed, and in the midst of the stillness of the night travels many hundred miles. It reaches its destination. It is received quietly by the hand of the servant. Alone, it may be, with no human eye to observe, it is 'read.' But what is the character of the influence put forth by this still messenger? How many such an epistle has, within a few moments, announced a serious change in life's future history,—the wreck of a fortune,—the loss of a life, on which the joys of many lives were suspended,—the overturning of a throne.

'Did you ever,' says a thoughtful writer, 'gaze upon a tree while it was growing in the spring? It was full of active life. The leaves were coming into sight; and later on the buds opened into blooming flowers, and ended in pendent fruit. Yet how quiet! The noise of a growing forest would not disturb an infant's sleep. All work of *life* and *healing* is calm and quiet in its nature.'

The noisy influences of life are the least real: the silent forces the most potent. It is the deep and growing conviction of my soul, that we want more holy silence about our religion. We want it in our individual lives—less talk, and more earnest living and quiet working. We want it in the pulpit—less clamour, and more studied and solemn thoughtfulness. We want it in

worship,—less noise and fewer words, like the prayer of Hannah, whose lips uttered no sound, but whose spirit in an agony of supplication made them quiver.

'Soundless as chariots on the snow,
The saplings on the forest grow
To trees of mighty girth;
Each nightly star in silence burns,
And every day in silence turns
The axle of the earth.

'The silent frost with mighty hand
Fetters the rivers and the land
With universal chain;
And smitten by the silent sun
The chain is loosed, the rivers run,
The lands are free again.'

Observe the moral material employed by God in His writing. 'Written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in *fleshy tables of the heart.*' The material is a heart rendered soft and plastic to the touch of God's hand—not a fleshly, but a 'fleshy' material. 'This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their *hearts.*' There is adaptedness—a suitability of the material to the writing to be imprinted on it. God can write His 'new name' only where the old name is obliterated. The wax must be warm before it can receive the impress of the seal. If cold and hard it will not yield to the image. 'Yield yourselves unto

God' is the indispensable condition of receiving the image and superscription of Christ. God gives His autograph only to the heart that entertains Him as a guest. Breathe on steel and the breath will instantaneously vanish; breathe on glass on a clear frosty morning, and the frost will be resolved into innumerable particles of liquid pearls. Write on blotting paper, and the writing will be unintelligible: use paper duly prepared, and the writing will be clear and permanent. It is likewise with human hearts and the operations of the Divine Spirit. Sin must be subdued before purity can reign: enmity must be cast out in order that love may rule; and before peace can become a constant guest 'the Son of peace' must there take up His residence.

Names.

DANIEL I. 6, 7.

Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego.

IT is obvious that the highest import of names arises from their association with the highest of all Beings. This is, apparently, the recognized belief both of Christian and heathen lands. Among Jews and Christians a name gathers around it a halo of beauty, strength, and sanctity, by reason of its relations with the Divine. In pagan climes a name becomes significant and revered in proportion to its connection with some idol deity.

An illustration of this is furnished in the first chapter of Daniel. Daniel and his three Hebrew companions had received from their fathers names divinely significant. No sooner are they brought into Babylon than they are

called upon to assume the names of the idol gods belonging to the land of their captivity. 'Thus, instead of Jehovah, these His servants were dedicated by the heathen to their four leading gods—Bel, the chief god; the Sun-god; the Earth-god; and Fire-god. To the last the three youths were consigned when refusing to worship the golden image.'

What the 'prince of the eunuchs' did with these young and heroic Hebrews, 'the prince of the power of the air' seeks to effect with the children of faith everywhere. His great effort is to merge the divine in the human; the spiritual in the material; and to convert the Church to the world.

As a holy stimulus against this attempt of the evil one, let us reflect a moment on the transcendent worth and blessedness of being related to the spiritual—suggested by the contrast between the original names of these four Hebrews, and the names which substituted them.

DANIEL.

Daniel's name may be rendered 'God my judge.' Instead thereof he was called 'Belteshazzar,' derived from 'Bel,' the chief idol of Babylon. Daniel's estimate of this change may be inferred from the small use he made of it. He appears to have regarded it as no compliment. He would rather be accounted a poor despised Hebrew, with Jehovah for his judge, than be the prince of the god of this world—'choosing rather to suffer afflic-

tion with the people of God' than share the honours of a royal court.

We wonder not that he loved his proper name. Was it not peculiarly and eminently suited to his circumstances of trial on several occasions? Misrepresented, vilely accused and condemned, how full of rich consolation was the expressive teaching of his name—'*God is my judge!*' His judge was 'able to deliver him' out of all circumstances, however perilous. Did he need wisdom and strength? He could say, '*Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his.*' 'The magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans,' in blank and frantic amazement, turned to their chief gods in vain for counsel and help in the hour of their extremity; while Daniel, respecting his God, could say, '*He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee; for thou hast made known unto us the king's matter.*'

Thrice happy are they who, like Daniel, have God for their judge, for He 'judgeth righteous judgment.' The principles and maxims of the world, like those of Babylon, are ever testing the character of the disciples of truth and holiness, and calling forth man's judgment. Whenever falsely judged, as many are, the just Judge can 'bring forth their righteousness as the light, and

their judgment as the noonday. He can turn the current of evil back upon those who have sent it forth, like the consuming flames that rushed upon those who sought to destroy their innocent victims. He can make the wrath of men, even the wrath of lions, praise Him; and the remainder of that wrath, like the mouths of the lions, He can restrain.'

Some, it may be, are needing comfort for a very different reason. They are free from the calumny of men; but are sorely perplexed and disquieted by reason of 'the wiles of the devil.' Satan is to them emphatically 'the accuser of the brethren.' He is ever reminding them of their sin—challenging even divine mercy to provide a judgment that shall pass over their transgressions. Their consciences are pained for want of peace, and their hearts heavy-laden for want of rest.

For all such the name of Daniel preaches 'glad tidings of great joy.' It declares to the soul the grand and simple fact that God knows of but one place where He judges His children. That one place is 'in Christ.' In Him there is 'no condemnation.' Take up thy residence, O doubting soul, under the shadow of Calvary, and fix it there; nor remove thence: what Daniel did with the window of his house, do thou with the window of thy faith—let it be thrown wide open to the light of the cross, in view of the enemy who seeks to accuse. Do this, and Daniel's strength shall be yours; and his name your rest and song—'*God my judge.*'

HANANIAH.

Hananiah signifies 'the grace, or favour, of God.' Shadrach, for which it was changed, denotes the same thing in an idolatrous sense—'the favour, or illumination, or inspiration of the Sun-god.'

A contrast is thus illustrated between the divine complacency and the favour and applause of the world. 'The god of this world' is worshipped with as much devotion as the Babylonians coveted the shining rays of their great Sun-god. The world's smiles, her caresses, honours, wealth, and pleasures, are the inspirations of the eager devotion of the multitude. In these things consists their sunshine: without them their path is unillumined, and changed into a cheerless waste. No expense or labour is spared in securing the bright and warm light. In the estimation of others it may be a light illusive, but to them it is the light of a god.

Thus does the wily enemy blind the minds of them that believe not; and blinds by light, for light is blinding when it only dazzles. There is a 'favour' that is 'deceitful,' and a 'beauty' that is 'vain.'

Contrasted with this is the true light, 'the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world,' revealing by its clear and steady rays all dangerous passes, pitfalls, and precipices, whereby so many perish through the glare of sin. Like a mild and joyous light the favour of God follows the path of every faithful Hananiah, calling forth from the full glad spirit the inspiring song, 'the

light of the sun rejoiceth the heart!' the light sending back to the heart the response, 'Whoso findeth me findeth life and shall obtain favour of the Lord.'

This 'favour' is a light that shines always. Unlike the Sun-god of the world, whose shining is fitful and disappointing, the divine Sun shines without intermission: 'clouds and darkness' may for a little intercept its beams, but they cannot extinguish them; behind the clouds they glow and burn with unimpaired lustre. With this favour all things redound to the soul's good, like showers, dews, and winds to the fertile plains. The clouds that overshadow life's history are blessed, for '*His favour is as a cloud of rain.*' The night dews of afflictions and bitter bereavements are blessed, for '*the King's favour is as dew upon grass.*' Like biting north winds the tempest of some great persecution may rage; but this also shall be blessed, evoking the song of faith—'*The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.*'

MISHAEL.

Mishael is composed of two Hebrew words which may be rendered 'comparable to God,' or 'resemblance to God.' The substituted name retains a part of the word, displacing the last syllable, which is the name of Jehovah, by the name of 'Shak,' the chief goddess of Babylon, the goddess of beauty and pleasure. Meshach therefore signifies a votary to the chief goddess of beauty and pleasure, who smiles upon all who bear her name.

Babylon's goddess still rules with successful sway. In Babylon the temptation is to be of Babylon—to do as Babylon does—to be 'lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.' Too often is the temptation yielded to by God's spiritual Israel. They are brought into captivity, where they are taught 'the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans:' familiarity with foreign scenes and circumstances follow: the home feeling grows upon them: their harps are no longer unstrung and hung upon the sympathetic willows, but attuned to the song and the dance of the Babylonians. They are no longer in 'a strange land,' unable to sing.

Heathen nations become like their deities—are assimilated to their recognized moral attributes. War-gods inspire warlike natures; wrathful deities develop man's worst passions—cruelty, revenge, and murder; while voluptuous and sensual deities encourage in their votaries all the vices of indolence. The names given to these four Hebrews were of little significance and utility in themselves; but had they been willingly assumed and cheerfully acknowledged and used, they would soon have become the great moulding forces of character—leading them to go after 'strange gods,' and to follow their idolatries. The soul of man is ruled over by 'lords many, and gods many.' Our idols are as numerous as the objects we serve; and the gods we serve stamp on us their image and inspire us with their attributes.

These faithful Hebrews, steadfast amidst abounding evils, true to their faith and their God, in the face

of bitter scorn and threatened death, are a noble type of the faithful of all ages who hold fast the sacred name of their divine baptism, and boldly stand forth as Jehovah's witnesses. Through scorching fires 'heated seven times' many of them have been called to pass, in proof of their high allegiance; but the fire has afflicted their enemies rather than them. The flames have but revealed the true beauty of the gold that shines in the burnished radiance of a celestial glory, the reflected presence of Him who is never absent from His refining fire, and whose manifested presence sometimes compels the enemy to acknowledge the reality and power of the name by which we are called. Daniel in the den never had kinder or stronger companions than the noble lions; and 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego' were never so angelic as when in the furnace they resembled 'the form of the Son of God.' Never are we more beautiful than when in faithfulness, in spite of sinful solicitations, we stand forth in the character of a distinct and 'peculiar people,' separated *from* evil, and separated *to* God.

AZARIAH.

This name may be rendered 'God my help.' 'Abed-nego' means 'servant of the shining fire,' or 'servant of Lucifer.' The two names furnish illustrations of the contrasted characters of the servants of righteousness and those of sin.

The service of sin is the service of grief. In a course

of evil pleasure and pain are twin companions. Light is attractive, and so is sin; but the light is the effect of fire, and fire burns: so does sin—like the glaring taper alluring to slay the bewildered moth.

Refusing to worship the golden image, the Hebrew youths were devoted to the 'Fire-god' of Babylon. The fate that overtook the men who cast them into the flames was awfully typical of the 'wages' of sin,' which is 'death.' They were 'servants of the shining fire,' and the fire slew them. Such, in a figure, is the history of sin. It is a 'Fire-god,' and pays its wages in fire.

> 'The mind that broods o'er guilty woes,
> Is like the scorpion girt by fire,
> In circle narrowing as it glows.
>
> * * * *
>
> So writhes the mind remorse hath riven,
> Unfit for earth, undoom'd for heaven,
> Darkness above, despair beneath,
> Around it flame, within it death.'

Such was the melancholy dirge of one who had been a true votary of the 'shining fire' of sin; and whose fall into an early grave might be described in the words of Scripture—'How hast thou fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning!'

In contrast with the helplessness of those who perished by the flames of the furnace, the three youths could sing, even in the fire—'*The Lord is our help.*' The fire did but burn their bonds and set them free to walk in company with the Lord Himself. No place

can exclude the Divine presence, no circumstances interdict the favour and help of God where His children are. With God as a companion 'all things work together for good.' Poverty is turned into wealth; weakness into strength; affliction into a 'weight of glory;' and at all times the heart may sing—'God is our refuge and strength, a very present *help* in times of trouble.'

Church Music.

PSALM CXXXIII. 1.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

O we really need a call to '*behold*' anything divinely 'good and pleasant'? To be attracted by heavenly virtues should be as natural as for the eye to see and the ear to hear. But sin has introduced other objects than the true, the beautiful, and the good. And the tendency is for the evil to predominate. This tendency has been felt by the spiritual in all ages. It was implied in the prayer of the psalmist, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.' Surrounded with evil, he was conscious of possessing a nature capable of being influenced by it; and under the sense of weakness he solicited Divine aid. His sympathies were not with the evil. He desired to behold and seek after that which accorded with the nature and attributes of his God. He would see God disconnected

from nothing on which his eyes were fastened, and towards which his affections were drawn. Did he 'behold' the 'heavens'? To his eyes they 'declared the glory of God.' Did he behold the teeming objects of terrestrial nature? He saw on every hand the reflection of the wisdom, power, and love of the great Creator. And ascending to a higher plain of devout contemplation, he beheld with prophetic eye the bright future when the moral world should harmonize with the material, the natural with the spiritual; and when the Son of God, ruling in the midst of His Church, should inspire His devout followers to 'behold' His moral glories, and to be changed into the same image, while reflecting the graces of His Spirit they should fulfil the description of the words—'*How good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*'

Let a difference be observed between 'unity' and uniformity. The one is a Divine, the other a human thing. Acts of uniformity are the product of man. God only can make us the subjects of sacred 'unity.' Uniformity we get in trees and hedges hacked, cut, and clipped, so as to reduce them to a common size and shape. 'Unity' without uniformity we get in the trees of the forest, all growing according to the course of nature, of diverse shape, and size, and worth, but dependent for their wild strength and beauty on the same genial influences of nature, as they stretch out their thousand branches and myriad leaves to catch the light,

and air, and dew, and showers of heaven. Uniformity we have in the classified assortment of flowers, arranged in pots or plots of ground according to their size and colour, no one sort allowed to mingle with another. 'Unity' is the gathered bunch, worthy of the admiration of every beholder, whose difference of form, colour, and odour, only adds to the loveliness of the flowers, which are all bound by one cord, enclosed in the one vessel, and made to drink of the same vital element—the liquid stream of life.

We are told that it is highly probable that in the wide domain of material nature there are to be found no two things alike, not even two drops of water, or two flakes of snow. Who ever knew two human faces alike? or two voices with precisely the same cadence? or two human forms identical in every particular? Is it then a thing of astonishment that in the mental and moral world there should be differences of thought, and judgment, and feelings? 'One star differeth from another star in glory,' but amid all the varied glories of the 'heavens' there is no want of 'unity.' All are not of equal magnitude: all do not shine with equal lustre: some make swifter circuits than others; but all move in divinely appointed orbits; all serve divinely ordained ends; and all unite in one great choral hymn—

> 'For ever singing as they shine,
> The hand that made us is divine.'

No jarring note is heard in the magnificent harp from which is evoked 'the music of the spheres.' Why

should there be in the music of hearts that have been attuned to the song of a common redemption?

'*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments.*' The reference is to the consecration of Aaron, according to God's own appointment (Deut. xxx. 25). The holy oil poured upon his head, ran down upon his beard, reaching the very extremities of his priestly robes, and diffusing a pleasant odour all around.

Aaron is a type of Christ—'the High Priest of our profession.' He is God's anointed One—'anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows.' He is our risen Representative—'the Head of the Church which is His body.' How sublime is the allusion of the psalmist! The Church which Christ has been pleased to identify with 'His body' is on earth: its Head is in heaven; and from the Head to the whole of the members the anointing oil descends. He has received from the Father the anointing of the Spirit 'without measure,' and 'of His fulness we receive, and grace for grace.' According to our faith and asking do we receive: according to our measure of grace will be our resemblance to Him: according to that resemblance will be our love one for another 'as members of one body:' and according to our mutual affection as 'fellow-heirs of the grace of God,' will be the strength of unity

existing among Churches. Disunion, either between religious communities or individuals, betrays *distance* from Christ. A few faithful and warm-hearted disciples are content with no other place than that of the privileged John who reclined on the bosom of His Lord. Others with a less measure of devotion keep close to the 'skirts of His garments;' while the greater number occupy a remote situation, 'following afar off;' and consequently place themselves beyond reach of the full efficacy of the flowing and invigorating balm.

Two qualities characterize this unity—it is 'good and pleasant.'

It is '*good.*' It is essentially so. It is *of* God, because it is of *love*, and 'love is of God.' It is emphatically, therefore, 'like the precious ointment' wherewith Aaron and his sons were anointed. That consecrating oil was divinely prescribed: none were allowed to use the prescription, on penalty of a severe punishment, for any other purpose than that of the Lord's appointment. It was a thing *of God*, to be used *for* God, and according to God's intentions. It was a holy 'compound' for a very sacred service.

All that is of God is good. 'Unity' is of God, and is therefore good. Disunion is *incompleteness*, of which we cannot say that it is 'good.' An incomplete mind is an imbecile mind; an incomplete body is an impaired body; and an incomplete or divided Church is a diseased Church, to which the Redeemer certainly

cannot apply the words which as the Creator He used when He beheld everything that He had made, and 'saw that it was good.'

In prescribing the ointment to be employed for the purposes of consecration, the Lord said that it was to be '*a perfume, a confection, after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy.*' Any deviation from the prescribed order would not be recognized by God as 'good.' There were two purposes in particular which it was not to be used for: it was forbidden to be applied to the 'flesh' of the body; nor was it allowed to be used for any selfish end. To violate these conditions was to be 'cut off' from Israelitish fellowship and privileges; in other words, it was to be the cause of disruption or disunion.

The Church of Christ is a holy 'compound'—the making of many members, of many nations, and of many ages, '*one body.*' Hence the significance of the prayer of Jesus—'And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.' Practically the quality of this holy 'composition' is defective: it is no longer what it was intended to be—an unbroken fellowship: it has been used for 'carnal' or fleshly purposes, contrary to the divine law; and the effect is disunion, 'schism,' the rending of the body of Christ, spoiling its symmetrical form, and marking it with 'wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores.'

Well, if wounds exist in 'the body mystical,' there exists also a remedy. There is 'balm in Gilead and a physician there.' He is the physician of souls, with the balm of *love*, the 'mollifying ointment' wherewith He binds up the wounds of His disciples who have forgotten His 'new commandment' to 'love one another.' At a very early date His Church began to break this commandment, calling for the prescription which He gave through His servant Paul. See! is it not a characteristic one, written with His own hand, '*Forbearing one another in love.*'

Why should we refuse to do with the spiritual body what we are continually doing with the physical? If one member suffer all the rest suffer with it. If a finger be out of joint the whole hand must 'forbear' it. And it is the forbearance of 'love.' The hand does not cut off the offending finger in anger, nor the body refuse to claim relationship with the offensive limb; but in love for the hand or limb, the whole body 'forbears.' And not only so; but will not one member minister kindly to the wounds of another, the perfect member applying the balm, or plaster, to the imperfect?

Should it not be even so in the Church; one alienated section seeking the fellowship of another; one estranged member drawing near in love and forbearance to another; and all together putting themselves into close contact under the distilling influence of the Divine Spirit, under the balmy and healing overshadowings of His presence who '*healeth all our diseases.*'

The second quality ascribed by the psalmist to this 'unity' is *pleasantness*. It is 'good and pleasant,' like the oinment to which repeated reference has been made, which was a 'perfume.' All odours are not 'pleasant.' Some are very offensive and repulsive. Moral odours are equally so. Some Churches, as well as individuals, have made themselves notably repellent by their long-standing offensiveness. Solomon says, 'Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.' Would that there were no such 'flies of death' mixed up in the holy ointment of Christ's Church, shocking the spiritual senses of many, and preventing them being drawn to the fellowship of Christian societies.

'Unity' belongs to 'wisdom's ways:' 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness and peace.' She anoints with the 'oil of gladness' all who endeavour to keep 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' As perfume both ascends and diffuses itself abroad, so doth love. It came from heaven, and returns to it, and is felt by all who are the subjects of heavenly influences. It is an 'odour of a sweet smell unto God,' while it invites and draws the surrounding sympathies of the disciples to 'unity.' It is a *costly* thing, like Mary's box of ointment, and like it, when rightly used, can never run to 'waste.' Its waste is in its being *shut up*, like the heart of Judas, and kept for selfish purposes. Let the heart be broken with the love of Christ, like Mary's heart, and it

will accomplish a double object,—healing other wounded spirits, and 'filling the whole neighbourhood with the odour of the ointment.'

'*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*'

'The earth is full of love, albeit the storms
Of passion mar its influence benign,
And drown its voice with discords. Every flower,
That to the sun its heaving breasts expands,
Is born of love; and every song of birds
That floats mellifluous on the balmy air
Is but a love-note.'

As 'members of one body,' as 'partakers of one spirit,' as having 'an unction from the Holy One,' let us covet earnestly a residence in the vicinity of the heavenly 'Hermon.' Here let us build for ourselves a 'tabernacle,' not 'three,' but *one;* for one family, not for different households. Here let us 'dwell together in unity,' in the consciousness of the presence of the triune God, catching continually the rich descendings of the Spirit, qualifying us daily, as we go forth to the world, to carry with us, wherever we move, the holy contagion.

Thus shall we fulfil the condition of the Divine blessing. '*There the Lord commanded His blessing.*' God can bless us only according to His own appointed way. We may lose the blessing by failing in obedience. 'If we have not, it is because we ask not; or we ask, and receive not, because we ask amiss, that we may consume it upon our lusts.' Too often do we ask thus 'amiss.'

We ask in prayer for the Spirit of God to guide us, to teach us, to lead us into all truth; to give us the single eye, and to make us love as brethren. And no sooner are the words uttered than we fall into the consideration of our own plans—angry, like Jonah, when our own ideas and purposes are overturned. We ask for a 'single eye' while we are loving that which is 'double;' for one heart while preferring that which is divided; for 'the mind of Christ' when we are determined to have our own. The blessing is asked 'to consume it upon our lusts.' The holy ointment is sought as a covering for the flesh, and for selfish ends; and this is contrary to the Divine law. The blessing, therefore, is denied, and evil takes its place.

Wherein we have failed in the past, let us truly repent. 'Let the past suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles.' Then the Lord will 'command' the blessing, saying, '*I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.*' '*Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.*'

Moral Forces.

PSALM I. 1, 2.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and nigt.

N this psalm David speaks of two great moral forces—'the law of the Lord' and 'the counsel of the ungodly.' The one is the law of order, beauty, harmony, and rest. The other is the law of confusion, deformity, discord, and disquietude.

'THE LAW OF THE LORD.'

The law of God is the binding force of the universe, material and moral. It keeps in order alike the stars of heaven and the angels before the throne. On all within and on all without us is the inscription of Divine law. Every evil that curses the earth and humanity is the effect of violated law.

In obedience to 'the law of the Lord' consists—

'*The way of the righteous.*' Humanity is divided into two great classes—'the righteous' and 'the ungodly;' those who walk the 'narrow way,' and those who tread the 'broad road.' The former class walk the way of 'life and peace'—'*their delight is in the law of the Lord.*' 'Blessed (or happy) are the undefiled in the way.' 'Great peace have they which love thy law.' A guilty conscience is the effect of broken law, just as a morbid melancholy mind is the effect of a diseased body. Hence true happiness is to be enjoyed only by those who walk 'the way of the righteous.' The world does not see this, because it will not '*meditate*' on Divine law. The wicked regard God's laws as restraining. So they are; but they are the restraints of *love*. Divine law is Divine love in action. It is the negative response of parental love and wisdom when the child asks for poison.

'THE COUNSEL OF THE UNGODLY.'

The law of *evil* is opposed to the law of *goodness*. The kingdom of Satan is in antagonism to the kingdom of Christ. The angels who kept not their first estate rose up in foul counsel against the Divine laws. Ever since that dark period evil has been associated with a 'counsel.' Hence its fearful potency. Sinners do not stand *alone*. They go 'hand in hand.' The devil knows full well the importance of *unity*. 'One sinner destroyeth much good,' because one sinner always seeks another to keep him company. Who does

not know that in order to corrupt good fruit it is only necessary to expose it to the influence of decayed fruit? The strength of goodness and of evil alike is in unity. The Church is weak because Christians too much resemble shredded flax. Wickedness is strong because the flax is wrought into the knotty cordage. The army of Satan is strong because all his soldiers are recruiting officers.

'*The way of the ungodly*' has several gradations. Its commencement is indicated by—

'*Walking*.' This figure may express very slight intimacy with evil. In walking we get only a cursory view of things: we cast around us but a passing glance. Hence we learn the importance of watching against the beginning of temptation. 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.' How important the admonition of Solomon—'Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not into the way of evil men: avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away: let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee!' How great is the power for evil lodged in companionship! How bitter is this thought to many as they recall the first temptation by an ungodly associate, the first oath, the first lie, the first unchaste look or desire, the first breach of the law of honesty! 'How great a matter a little fire kindleth!'

The second stage of the sinner's progress is indicated by—

'*Standing.*' This is expressive of a concentration of interest, or of fixity of purpose. The word 'statue' is significant of *steadfastness,* being derived from the Latin verb 'to stand.' The apostle admonishes the Galatians to 'stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free.' Lot's wife stood and looked back on Sodom, and became a fixture—a standing memorial to all who walk not in 'the law of the Lord.' The figure which the psalmist employs may represent the companion of the ungodly as having his attention arrested, and standing to look on with admiration. Or slightly to vary the illustration, we have before us two persons who, after meeting and exchanging the ordinary salutations of friendship, and walking together for a while, become so mutually interested in their theme of converse that imperceptibly they slacken their pace, until they are seen face to face in absorbing discussion. Both goodness and badness are *interesting.* Our companions will make us either better or worse. Moral character, whether good or evil, is infectious. This arises from moral sympathy. The absence of sympathy is the great gulf that prevents friendship between souls. Hence the sinner will either win over his companion to the side of evil, or his companion will win him to the side of virtue; or they will separate.

The third stage of the sinner's progress is indicated by—

'*Sitting.*' This denotes the attitude of an instructor or leader. In Satan's school all are apt pupils, and are

speedily raised to be pupil teachers. And all who put themselves under their tuition soon find that a very few lessons are enough to make them proficients in the Satanic science of indoctrinating others with the elements of hell's philosophy. The wicked go to hell in companies. The way to it is a 'broad road,' and many there be that find it.

My brother, let thy heart be impressed with this one truth—that moral character is ever in a state of *transition* from bad to worse, or from good to better. David represents the Christian as first *looking* into the Divine law—he '*meditates.*' Then '*his delight is in it.*' And then he delights in it as a holy habit—'*day and night.*' So also with the wicked. At first the sinner only *walked* in the way of evil; then it was not very difficult to turn away his eyes from beholding vanity. A subsequent stage found him *standing* and looking on. The third stage saw him delighting in evil and a teacher of it. Thus progression is the gravitating force of the moral world. We are daily growing and strengthening in sin or holiness. Every fresh act of guilt is the addition of a new link in the chain of the soul's vassalage. Every holy act is another step attained on the mountain heights of truth and purity—another Excelsior cry! Every day makes it harder to abandon 'the way of the sinner;' more easy to walk 'the way of the righteous.' Every hour of the sinner's life is a *defeat:* with the Christian it is a *conquest.*

'Who did Hinder You?'

GALATIANS v. 7—9.

Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

HERE are 'in the human body organs that are vital, and others that are not. The loss of an arm is injury: a wound in the heart or brain is death.' There are about a building parts that are fundamental and necessary to its standing: there are others that are ornamental, but not essential to its usefulness or existence. It is so with respect to Christianity. Some truths are indispensable to its being; others to its well-being; and others supplemental to its beauty.'

The truth for which the apostle so earnestly contends in this chapter is a vital one—essential to the existence of Christianity. The Galatian Church was being 'troubled' by the encroachments of the great enemy of truth. Certain false teachers sought to in-

troduce an admixture of Judaism, and to rob the doctrine of the cross of its divine simplicity by making circumcision indispensable to salvation.

This evil 'leaven' the apostle seeks to eradicate before the whole lump should be leavened. Already its working was too apparently mischievous. Through it some who did 'run well' had been 'hindered.' It was an insidious under-current which, if not speedily arrested, would sap and destroy the foundations. It was an incipient element of decay, which, undetected and unexpelled, would soon reach the heart of the Church's life, and make it a moral paralytic.

Hence the alarm is sounded. Like a noble general, Paul sees the advancing foe, and prepares for it. Like a skilful mariner who knows the rocks and sands against which his own bark had struck, he erects the beacon for the safety of others. Amidst the darkness of the world's night, and the storms of persecutions, he seeks to direct the eye and fix it on the divine Lighthouse built on the Rock of Ages, bearing on its noble front the words that 'give light and save life'—'*Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*'

The familiar figure of a race is borrowed from the ancient athletic sports. Among other feats of power the runner challenged the strength of a competitor whom he sought to outstrip in pedestrian strength, whereby he would obtain a garland or some other symbol of cham-

pionship. To this custom frequent allusions are made in Scripture. 'Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain' (1 Cor. x. 24). 'Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us' (Heb. xii. 1). 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith' (2 Tim. iv. 7). 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day' (Prov. iv. 18).

In this course there are '*hindrances*'—'Who did hinder you?' or, 'who put a stop to you?' 'The expression alludes to one going across the course, so as to jostle and stop the runner.' We all know that if resistance be given to a body in motion it will be impeded in its progress, and that if the resistance continue long enough, its motion will be altogether stopped. A feather and a stone would fall to the ground with equal rapidity did the atmosphere interpose no resisting medium or obstruction. But the air having more power over the lighter than the heavier body, the velocity of the stone is imperceptibly lessened, while the descent of the feather is almost completely arrested.

A similar obstruction prevails in the moral world. The atmosphere of sin is the resistance, the obstructive medium of the soul's movements; its progress heavenward and God-ward. Christian life is a warfaring as

well as a wayfaring life—a life in which we are called to wage an incessant duel—the opposition of flesh and spirit; 'for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other.'

The unconverted man is a stranger to all this. He has, practically, but one life—the life of sin; the life of self-will: he lives as he likes, and all his likings are in the direction of sin. He knows of no 'hindrances' in his course, save those which may be imposed by the body or earthly circumstances. The law of his life is the law of self-rule, that knows no spiritual counteractant.

But there is another law to which the Christian is subject. It is '*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.*' He carries about with him two lives—self and Christ—the 'carnal mind' and the 'spiritual mind.' The 'carnal mind,' like birds of carrion, has a tendency to keep company with 'death.' The spiritual mind, dove-like, knows only the fellowship of 'life and peace.' Conversion, in the strict sense of the term, is not an exchange of an evil nature for a contrary one. 'That which is born of the flesh' is not turned into Spirit: it 'is' flesh, and remains such. Darkness cannot shed light. A fountain of salt water cannot send forth fresh streams. White cannot be extracted from black; nor a 'clean thing brought out of an unclean.' But darkness can be illuminated by light; and the bitter made less bitter by the sweet; and the black be made to look less black; and the unclean be daily and hourly washed.

In other words, without a figure, the life of God in the soul can be made practically what it is in reality—a controlling and regulating force, moulding and fashioning the lower to the higher, the earthly to the heavenly, the carnal to the spiritual.

Conversion puts the soul into its proper posture before God. Its language is—O Christ, I am vile and black by sin; but I take Thee for my righteousness, and am made 'comely.' I am weak and helpless; but I ally myself with Thee, that I may be made strong by the strength of another. I am, in myself, a nature at variance with Thee, at 'enmity' with Thee; but I surrender my nature to Thee to subdue it, to rule it, to keep it in proper check, and to make it give way to all the sweet influences of Thy Spirit.

There is then in the history and experience of the Christian an evil 'leaven'—'the leaven of wickedness'—of a nature that is ever proving itself 'contrary' to God. Too often is it allowed to 'work' as the resisting medium of the Spirit's strivings and pleadings—'leavening' the whole character and making it a weak and sickly thing. In thought, in speech, in temper, and unruly dispositions, in conformity to the principles and customs of the world, how often has this leaven revealed itself, and wrought its injurious effects, of sorrow to ourselves, and of dishonour to our higher and better life!

The unhappy effects of sin in general, as well as the particular sin of which the apostle treats in this chapter,

may be illustrated by the terms used in the context. False teaching was 'troubling' the Galatian Church, and threatening to 'entangle' it with the 'yoke of bondage.' What these false teachers sought to do in corrupting the mind by erroneous doctrine, Satan is ever seeking to accomplish through the corruption of the heart and unholy living. By the 'snares of the devil' the disciples of Christ become 'unequally yoked,' whereby they are brought into 'bondage' and 'trouble,' like the camp of Israel, through the sin of Achan.

The fish entangled in the net, and the bird by the cage, are 'hindered,' the one in swimming, and the other in flying. The noble steed 'yoked' to a cumbrous chariot, is 'hindered' in swift motion. The slave, with hands and feet manacled, is 'hindered' in service, and cannot work. It is so with sin. It hinders the soul, and prevents it swimming in the deep calm waters of divine peace. It clips the spirit's pinions, and encages the celestial bird, and so 'troubles' it that it cannot sing. It shakes the heart's confidence, and inspires fear, and renders the soul 'halt and lame.' But they that wait upon the Lord in filial obedience, and 'live in the Spirit,' do 'renew their strength:' they 'mount up with wings as eagles; they run and are not weary; they walk and do not faint.'

In addition to the numerous statements of Scripture relative to the possibility of departing from the living God, through the power of temptation; how saddening

are the most prominent examples with which we are so familiar! We are reminded of Moses who, being 'hindered,' was shut out from the promised land. We are reminded of Samson who, being 'hindered,' was degraded from a prince in Israel to a slave of the Philistines, and whose sin abbreviated his days. We are reminded of David who, being 'hindered,' gave such melancholy reason to the enemies of God to blaspheme, while he sadly acknowledged that his sin was 'ever before him.' And of Peter, also, the record of whose bitter tears are the perpetual memorial of Satan's power to 'hinder' and make us 'fall from grace.'

Observe the process by which these hindrances are wrought. It is by the power of *littles*,—'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' Was it not by comparatively little things that the great men whose names have just been referred to, leave so great a stain on the page of their history? He whose royal faith emboldened him to refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, was overcome by the utterance of angry words. He who could snap asunder like tow the strong cords which bound him, was enslaved and ruined through a woman. He who was a world-renowned king, and the conqueror of nations, was woefully conquered by a single lust. And he whose holy jealousy for his master nerved his arm to wield the destructive sword, was ensnared through the fear of man.

It is by the power of little things that 'the prince

of this world ruins sinners and 'hinders' saints. By gradual and almost imperceptible temptations, rather than by convulsive shocks, are his signal triumphs achieved. Christians lose their strength as some suppose the planets to lose their motion—'bit by bit, little by little.' It is by the power of little insects that great coral islands are constructed: atoms compose the universe, and units make up millions. It is out of little omissions that great neglects are born; out of little indulgences that giant habits are formed; by little frettings, and perversities of disposition, that unbearable tempers are trained; by little words of strife that murderous passions are nourished and strengthened; by little concessions that great principles and vital truths are renounced; and it is by 'a little more sleep, a little more slumber, and a little more folding of the hands in sleep,' that spiritual weakness and poverty, like 'armed men,' have invaded the Church of Christ, and changed its character as a vineyard full of labourers into a *consumptive hospital,* in which there are not a few who seem to be among the 'incurables.' 'It is the power of littles that does the work of death with most men; and these march not to the sound of fife or drum, but steal on with muffled tread, as the foe steals on the sleeping sentinel.' '*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.*'

By the power of little things let us seek our strength. With the faithfulness of a true sentinel let the sacred

precincts of the soul be duly guarded against the admission of the least traitor. Let a strict watch be set against the door of the lips, that no treacherous words may troop forth; and against the door of the heart, that no rebel lusts may proceed. Let the slackened pace be vigilantly detected, and the feeble step be quickened and strengthened. Let the least stone be removed, and there will remain no 'stone of stumbling.' In suppressing the rising of little angry feelings, in stifling little angry words, in forbearing little injuries, in forgiving little insults, and in performing little kindnesses, we shall be enrolled among the truly valiant, of whom it is written, 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.'

It was by a little thing that sin entered the world. It is by a little thing that peace enters the heart. Eve looked at the serpent, and believed his word. Faith looks at Christ, and believes His word. The one looked and *died*. The other looks and *lives*.

'Who shall Roll Away the Stone?'

MARK XVI. 3.

And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

GIVE me, said Archimedes, 'a point without the world, and I will lift it from its poles.' The cross of Christ was this 'point.' Outside his native home the Son of God voluntarily went forth to suffer. He suffered 'without the camp.' He put himself under the law, under 'the curse,' and clothed Himself with 'shame,' 'that He might redeem us from the curse of the law,' and for ever '*roll away our reproach.*' On the cross—on that wondrous spot of the world's history called Calvary—He lifted the mighty 'lever' by which He raised a sunken world from the depths of 'sin and death'—unbolted the doors of stern Justice—made all the keepers of the prison tremble—proclaimed liberty to the captives—loosed every one's bands of

death—'opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers,' and in announcing the full accomplishment of His work cried, '*It is finished!*'—the proclamation that thrilled the inhabitants of earth, heaven, and hell, and uttered the prophecy and bestowed the pledge of a new and glorious era, when earth shall revolve on a fresh moral axis of 'righteousness and peace.'

Here the convicted and trembling sinner finds the answer to all his fears. Is he 'convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment?' Here he sees sin 'put away'—'righteousness without the law' secured through faith—judgment deprived of its terrors. The question of conscious personal guilt and condemnation can receive no answer save in the cross of Christ. Many who see not this truth are practically 'making the cross of Christ of none effect' through their acts of self-righteousness and unbelief. They are trying to roll away their burden by human strength. They are seeking *to do* what has been already *done!* They are 'seeking the living among the dead'—a living Christ among dead forms and symbols, or among the 'dead works' belonging to self. If they would but look with the eye of faith into the empty grave of Jesus, they would rejoice in seeing the stone removed, and the Saviour risen—sin put away by a dead Christ, and the soul justified by a living Christ, who has buried for ever, in the grave He has left, the sin of every believing sinner. 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. . . . Say not in thy heart,

Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, *the word of faith;* that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart *that God hath raised him from the dead,* thou shalt be saved.'

But notwithstanding the blessed efficacy of the atonement of Christ, sin is a great *ruling* power in the world. Hence the necessity of the manifold agencies of the gospel and kindred instrumentalities — of both defensive and aggressive weapons against 'the powers of darkness.' In opposing these 'powers,' and in seeking to spread the light of the kingdom of truth, the disciples of Christ often ask the question of the text. Despondency overtakes them in their work: the heart begins to faint and grow weary, the hands hang down, and the knees become feeble, and faith wavers. We think of the small and unsatisfactory results of Christian enterprise. The fruit appears very unequal to the expensive outlay. Have we not almost 'laboured in vain, and spent our strength for nought?' How many sermons have been preached without any apparent benefit, which have cost many precious hours of thought and anxiety in their preparation, and earnest zeal and ardent prayer in their enunciation? How many tracts have been put into circulation that have but served for

waste paper? What valuable time, in unthankful service, has been cheerfully rendered to the Sabbath-school, at the expense of health and rest? If work so carefully planned and agencies so earnestly employed have effected such poor results, what other means shall be used? What more can be done? How shall the desired ends be realized? *'Who shall roll us away the stone?'*

It is a good thing to be compelled to ask a question that reminds us of our own weakness in our relations to the service of God. We are prone to forget where our strength lies. Our Heavenly Master sometimes permits failure in His servants to teach them their dependence on Himself. Human power is limited, but Divine power is without a limit. Let faith be rooted and grounded in God—in the *word* of God—in the *work* of God—in 'the *power* of God'—in Him who is 'able to do all things,' to whom all human difficulties are but as the mist of morning before the burning sun. It is *'not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.'*

And in these words we have yet further encouragement. If human instrumentalities hold out but small prospects of the regeneration of the world—of the bright and blessed epoch that is the burthen of the spirit of prophecy, let us have faith in God. He will work, and 'none shall let it.' No stone of stumbling shall stand in His way, when His purposes shall have ripened, and the hour shall have arrived for the putting

forth of His might. Then will He draw near to the grave of the world's long-standing corruption, as long ages ago in human flesh He stood at the grave of Lazarus and commanded the removal of 'the stone that lay upon it.' Then shall earth's jubilee be born. Let 'loose' at the emancipating word, creation shall end her groans, cast aside her sackcloth, throw away her bands, and shine forth in the beauty of the millennial morning. Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written—'*The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.*'

Look at the text in its relation to various circumstances of human weakness and necessity. God is ready to do for us what we ourselves are not able to accomplish. It was an absolute necessity, to the fulfilment of the hopes and expectations of the devout women who asked the question of the text, that the stone should be rolled away. They were unable to remove it, for it was 'very great.' Had the Saviour's resurrection depended on *their* strength they must have returned home disappointed in not receiving the fulfilment of His promise. It was not, however, so contingent. What they could not do by reason of weakness, God did for them through an angelic deputy.

Do we not too often fall into the faithlessness and anxious questioning of these timid disciples? We put

our trust in the creature too confidingly. We imagine that wealth, genius, mental and physical strength, are absolutely indispensable in effecting certain given ends. Not content in knowing that the Divine word is pledged in our behalf, we begin to speculate, to reason, to doubt. Consequently, in the absence of the supposed necessary conditions and instrumentalities, our faith falters, our fears gather like clouds, our unbelief strengthens, and in the spirit of anxious corroding care, we repeat the inquiry—'*Who shall roll us away the stone?*'

1. This question is applicable to those who are seeking *Divine guidance and direction.* Some question of difficulty lies before them, and they cannot solve it. They feel how deficient is the aid of human advisers. They need counsel that is not of earth. The language of the soul is—'Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do?'—'*Whither* wilt thou have me to go?'—'Lead me, and guide me!'

In such circumstances the attitude of the soul must be that of a simple and settled faith in God. He is not only 'mighty to save,' but He is 'The Mighty Counsellor.' His promise is—'I will guide thee with mine eye.' The only *condition* is the surrender of *self-will*—'Be not as the horse or the mule which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle.' To be involved in circumstances of doubt and perplexity respecting some path is no evidence of the want of the Divine favour, as some would have us be-

lieve. God sometimes keeps His children in the dark to secure their safety. It is better that a child should be struck blind than that he should rush over a precipice. It is a good thing when the want of more light leads a child of God to hesitate, and, by hesitancy, to avoid taking a step that would be a downward one, attended with serious evil. God is not the creator of darkness, but He waits His own time to say to the darkness, 'Let there be light!' The wicked walk in the light of their own eyes, a light of temporary brightness; but it soon expires, and is followed by dense darkness, a 'darkness that is felt.' '*The light of the wicked shall be put out.*' 'Behold,' saith God, 'all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled.' The light of *sparks!*—what is it worth? How soon is it extinguished! What a contrast is the preceding verse! 'Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.' (Isa. l. 10.) 'Let him trust in the *name* of the Lord,' whose name is 'Light,' and who in His own time will shine with glorious brightness, and 'roll away' the darkest clouds—making the path of the just '*as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*'

2. This question is applicable to the subjects of anxious care through *poverty* and *affliction*. The people

of God are mostly 'a poor and afflicted people.' It seems strange to some that it should be so—apparently contrary to much that is revealed of the Divine heart of Love. But so it is, and it is good that it is so—'very good.' Our Heavenly Father knows the character and natural temperaments of His children too well to allow them to have their own way in everything. Their education and discipline must accord with the diversity of character that reigns among them. Amongst the many questions belonging to their welfare is the consideration of the associations and atmosphere of their earthly residence. There is 'evil' in the world from which it is necessary they should be 'kept.' This is not their native home: it is their school: many of their companions are aliens, and the air is ungenial to soul-health and prosperity. There are a few who live so near the 'Sun of Righteousness' that the sunshine of worldly prosperity does not hurt them: by it they are both benefited and able to benefit others. But with the majority it is a light that is injurious—that retards the growth and blights the blossoms of the 'trees of righteousness.' To the branches that have an 'abiding' fellowship with the 'vine' it brings no danger; but to those whose communion is practically cut off, who are not nourished by the vine's vital juices, it is a light that kills the 'fruit' and 'withers' the branches.

Whatever may be the nature of the special circumstances of trial which now press upon the soul of the child of God, let faith be maintained in vigour. God

will make a way of escape where it is needed. He will remove the stone from the door, and send forth His messenger of deliverance, as truly as He sent an angel to deliver Peter from his chains and his prison. He is the 'living God,' the 'God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,' the God who is faithful to all He hath promised, who is *above* all circumstances, however painful and trying; and who can, therefore, lift out of them those who are feeling their crushing pressure. However hot the furnace, He will ever be with them who are thrust into it, to sustain them while in it, and in His own time to deliver them from it. However limited his children's supplies, He can make the widow's barrel of meal exhaustless, and her cruise of oil unfailing. Reason and sense say, 'There is a lad here that hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes, *but what are these among so many?*' Faith says, 'Stand still and see the salvation of God.' *He will 'roll away the stone.'*

3. This question is applicable to the *persecuted and tempted believer.* The outside world knows but little of the wiles and snares that Satan plies against souls through the instrumentalities of old associations, or fellow-workmen, or unbelieving relatives; or through the keen susceptibilities of evil habits and tendencies—temptations that are like sparks to flax to them, while they fall on others like fire on water. There is but one heart in the universe that fully sympathizes with the new-born soul who is combating with a hero's strength against various forms

of evil; who is passing through a perpetual fire in meekly and patiently enduring the reproach and ridicule of those who, when they have failed to seduce from the path of divine rectitude and obedience, vent forth a whole volley of satanic artillery of hatred and rancorous venom. They who endure such 'contradiction of sinners' are pre-eminently the followers of Christ—as sublime a race of martyrs as many who have gone to the stake for Christ.

Be of good cheer, my tempted brother! God shall strengthen thee in thy weakness. He shall nerve thee for thy duty. He 'will not suffer thee to be tempted above that thou art able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that thou mayest be able to bear it.' He knows the loyalty of thy heart; knows that thou wouldst rather die than dishonour His name; knows that the great endeavour and prayer of thy life is to avoid every 'stone of stumbling,' and will therefore 'hold thee up in His hands lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.' Rejoice then, and let this be thy song: 'Thou hast given me the shield of Thy salvation, and Thy right hand hath holden me up, and Thy gentleness hath made me great.'

4. Finally, the question applies to *the hour of death*. There are timid disciples, who all their life-time are 'subject to bondage through fear of death.' The prospect is to them a stormy voyage, a valley of deep and awful gloom, with no open door of light and gladness.

They believe in the joy *beyond*, but they see only the closed and barred entrance, guarded by the 'King of Terrors.' Who shall deprive this monarch of his ghastly visage? Who shall rob the grave of its gloom? Who shall remove the mountain-weight that keeps the door shut, and prevents the light shining through, and the music bursting forth, that they may see the beauty and hear the gladness that reign within?

There is a hand strong enough to 'roll away' this stone. The hand of our Heavenly Father will do it whenever His voice shall be heard calling home His timid children. At His command the 'King of Terrors' shall vanish, and the 'swellings of Jordan' become a divided stream, a 'dry-shod' passage. How blessedly have the children of God been disappointed in reaching the terminus of life! As with the disciples on their way to the tomb of Jesus, so has it been with them—*an angel has gone before them to meet them as they entered and to fill the dark tunnel with celestial sunshine.* It was 'at the rising of the sun' the disciples reached the sepulchre. To the Christian death is a glorious 'sun-rising.' The eye of *sense* sees only the western horizon, and says, The sun is going down. The eye of *faith* turns to the glowing east, and sees 'the rising sun.' At the grave of every saint an angel sits, saying—'*He is not here: he is risen!*'

And yet further do the words of the text extend. They have an application to the emancipation of the

body, as well as that of the soul—to the bright and radiant morning of the resurrection of the dead in Christ. There are those with whom it seems 'a thing incredible that God should raise the dead.' But why is this? 'Why should it seem a thing incredible?' 'To God all things are possible.' Therefore He will raise the dead 'by the great power whereby He is able to subdue all things unto himself.' What a morning of joy will that be—'a morning without clouds!' '*Take ye away the stone,*' will be the command of Jesus to His attendant angels, respecting every grave of all who sleep 'well;' and in obedience to the voice the sleepers shall '*come forth*' to exchange their dusty shrouds for the vestments of immortality. Yet again shall the mandate be—'*Loose them, and let them go;*' and responsive to the bidding shall every glorified body rise to 'go' and meet its long-absent spirit. Nor shall sin, or death, or the grave, ever again effect a divorce. 'They shall enter in through the gates into the city,' and sit down to the bridal joys of heaven; and 'sorrow and sighing shall for ever flee away.'

'What poor weeping ones were saying
Eighteen hundred years ago,
We—the same weak faith betraying—
Say in our sad times of woe.
Looking at some trouble lying
In the dark, sad, dread unknown,
We too often ask with sighing,
"Who shall roll away the stone?"

'Thus with care our spirits crushing,
When they might from care be free,
And, in joyous songs outgushing,
Rise in rapture, Lord, to Thee!
For, before the way was ended,
Oft we've had with joy to own
Angels have from heaven descended,
And have rolled away the stone.

'Many a storm-cloud sweeping o'er us
Never pours on us its rain;
Many a grief we see before us
Never comes to cause us pain.
Ofttimes in the feared to-morrow
Sunshine comes,—the cloud has flown;
Ask not, then, in foolish sorrow,
"Who shall roll away the stone?"

'Burden not the soul with sadness;
Let the wiser be thy choice;
Drink the wine of life with gladness;
God will bid thy heart rejoice.
In to-day's bright sunshine basking,
Leave to-morrow's care alone;
Spoil not present joy by asking,
"Who shall roll away the stone?"'

The Temptation of Christ.

MATTHEW IV. 1.

Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

ERE we have a meeting of the two most wondrous beings in the universe—the highest and the lowest in moral character—the best friend of man, and the basest foe of man—the embodiment of truth, and the incarnation of falsehood—the great source and essence of love, and the source and quintessence of enmity and deadly hate.

There is much that is mysterious here. But mystery is everywhere. We are daily encountering it. No anatomist has yet unraveled the mysteries of the human body; no naturalist the mysteries of nature; no theologian the mysteries of the Bible. But to refuse to be led by the truth because there are mysteries connected with it would be as vain and foolish as the conduct of

the mariner who should throw away his compass because of the mysteries of electricity; or who should spurn the aid of the heavenly bodies because of the mysteries of light.

Amidst much that surpasses our comprehension one truth stands out boldly—that the existence of the devil is a reality, and his influence also. Men in their thoughtlessness may jest about the person and agency of Satan, but one thing is certain, we never find Christ doing so. Nor is there anything about the transactions recorded in this piece of Bible history calculated to provoke a jest. Rather should our fears be excited by the fact that if the devil was permitted for awhile to become the tempter of the Son of God, his influence with men is such as should make them afraid of Satanic being and agency.

The first word of the text gives us the *period* when the event here recorded took place; connecting the temptation with the circumstance related in the concluding words of the preceding chapter. 'And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*'

In these words we have the Spirit of God testifying of Jesus as the *obedient One*—as the object of Divine satisfaction and pleasure.

It remained now, therefore, for Jesus to prove Himself to be in the eyes of the world what He was in the eyes of the Father, that we also might know what was in His heart. The contrast between Christ and Israel of old consisted in this: the temptations of the wilderness developed what God well knew already, but which they were so prone to disbelieve—the wickedness of their hearts: the more they were tried the more fully did the evil of their hearts unfold itself: the troubling of the waters of their history cast up only 'mire and dirt.' But, like crystal water in a crystal vessel, the more Christ was tried the more did He prove Himself to be what the Father declared Him, the obedient One, in whom was found no fault.

To give to the world for all subsequent time the most marvellous demonstration that this was his character, He was 'led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.'

He was always '*led of the Spirit*'—doing nothing, saying nothing, going nowhere without the leading of the Spirit. The Spirit rested upon Him 'like a dove.' He was 'filled with the Spirit.' Hence he was girded for this conflict—he was found panoplied and fully equipped for the fight.

Our success in similar conflict will be in the measure of being clothed with the same divine energy. Being 'led of the Spirit' is the only guarantee of our being led out of temptation when led into it. 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.'

Words that teach us that we are never free from the presence of evil. The presence of lust is near those who 'walk in the Spirit,' sometimes most near when least apprehended. The Christian is never allowed a truce in his warfare. He is never warranted being off his watch-tower. Visibly and invisibly alike the attacks of the great enemy are incessant, and the holiest places and most hallowed occasions are chosen by the foe for his most successful encounters. 'The first Adam was tempted in the holy garden: the second in the holy city,' near the precincts of the holy temple. We ever need to 'watch and be sober.'

There are three things characterizing this temptation which somewhat correspond with the threefold character of Israel's temptations in the wilderness, whereby they so fatally fell and grievously sinned. They failed through *unbelief, presumption, and idolatry.*

1. Here was a temptation to *distrust.* Satan began with Jesus as with Eve—by insinuating a *doubt.* With Eve it was, 'Yea, *hath* God said?' With Jesus it was '*If* thou be the Son of God,'—a doubt of a twofold character, tempting Christ to doubt His sonship, and the faithfulness of the Divine care.

The voice had just been heard saying, 'This *is* my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Satan had audacity enough to insinuate in the mind of Christ a doubt.

The word of God has declared, in unequivocal terms,

the sonship of believers: 'Now *are* we the sons of God.' The effort of Satan is to get us to doubt this relationship. He knows well, doubtless, the holy stimulus and divine energy which confidence in this relationship is calculated to inspire—its separating and sanctifying power, and the gladness which it imparts. In proportion as this relationship is doubted are Christians weak and dispirited, in which state they are the more exposed to the 'wiles of the devil.'

To effect his purpose our enemy would seek to direct our attention to *ourselves*—hinging the assurance of the truth of God on some act or feeling of our own, rather than on the *Divine word.* The palpable touch of Christ that should convert stones into bread, rather than the voice that had declared the truth, the enemy would have to be the token of assurance to the Saviour of His relationship with, and interest in, the Father.

The written word of God should be to us what the spoken word of God was to Jesus—the perpetual rebuke of all Satan's lies. '*It is written,*' should ever explode the insinuating doubt, '*If thou be!*' The word of God is 'the sword of the *Spirit.*' We may say of it what David said of Goliath's sword—'*There is none like that: give it me.*'

In the words of Satan there was also a temptation to doubt the *paternal care* of the Father. How can it be that God can allow one in whom He delights to suffer 'hunger.' You have reason to doubt the reality of God's professed care and interest. Therefore help

yourself; and according to your pretensions to Divine power, 'convert these stones into bread!'

Substantially this was Satan's bait. To how many has it proved a successful one! It was so with Israel in temptation: so they murmured, saying, '*Is* the Lord among us? Can he furnish a table in the wilderness? *Can he give bread?*'

Where Israel failed, and where man so often fails, Christ stood faithful. He knew that in the great Father's House there was 'bread enough and to spare' without turning stones into loaves; and knowing this, He could patiently wait for the hand of the Father to feed Him.

The snares of the Deceiver are as varied and as numerous as are the chequered history and circumstances of men. Many of God's children with whom Satan would find it no easy task to get them to doubt their spiritual sonship, are easily tempted by the first trying circumstance in their social position to doubt the loving and tender care of God. But straits are no proof of the Father's want of interest in His children: it is not unfrequently the very reverse.

Faith believes that the hand that gives beauty and fragrance to the simple flower, and feeds the sparrows, will much more care for the *child.* Faith believes this because faith is not sight. To 'live by bread alone' would be to live by sight. To have one's barns filled with plenty is to make no room for faith: but to have one's house emptied of bread but filled with faith, is to

live, not on bread alone, but on '*the word of God:*' and that word assures us that 'bread shall be given' and 'rain from heaven.' Faith, believing this, can ever sing—'Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.'

2. The second form of temptation was a temptation to *presumption.* It was quite true, according to the quotation of Scripture made by Satan, that had Christ cast Himself down he would have been preserved; but by so doing He would have been to others an example of presumption. He would have been doing what was uncalled for. He was not 'led of the Spirit' to do it. To have done it therefore would have been to have entered into temptation.

It is one thing to be led into temptation, and another thing to enter it voluntarily. And we are only warranted in expecting deliverance from its power as we are found in the 'way' of duty. The promise cited by Satan was rendered incomplete by the omission of an important clause. The promise is—'He shall keep thee *in all thy ways.*' We may rest assured that God will keep His own people, but the condition is that they be found in His ways. Joseph was kept from the power of temptation because he was in the way of duty when

led into it. Samson was overcome by temptation, because he voluntarily entered it. Had Peter kept company with Christ, and not been in the way of the wicked, his feet would have been kept from falling, and 'his eyes from tears.' One of the defeats of Israel in warfare was the fruit of presumption, when they were chased 'as bees' before the Amorites. The Divine promise is,—'Because thou hast kept the *word* of my patience I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation.'

The most healing medicine may be turned into deadly poison through want of wisdom or skill in its administration by being misappropriated; so may the most precious promises and truths of God become detrimental to the interests of the soul when misapplied, or misquoted.

How often is God tempted in this way. 'It is written,' 'My sheep shall never perish.' So the Antinomian has said, 'We may live in sin.' Thus to reason is to tempt God. 'It is written,' 'The prayer of the righteous availeth much;' and so the worldly-minded parent has argued the certainty of his children's conversion, notwithstanding the inconsistencies of the daily life which make null and void every prayer. 'It is written,' 'He shall keep thee in all thy ways;' and on such a promise the Christian has based his faith that God will keep him anywhere and everywhere; and with a presumptuous folly, some have gone to the most objectionable places of amusement, expecting that God

will depute a guardian-angel to keep them from evil on the devil's play-ground. To act thus is to tempt God; and 'It is written,' 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'

3. The basest temptation was reserved for the last: with an audacity which words fail to express, the devil tempted the Saviour to *idolatry*—soliciting the homage of the Son of God.

Whatever we may have to say respecting the nature of the objects which, probably as a magnificent panorama, were made to appear before the Saviour's eye, one truth is clear—that what was represented was a cheat; what was promised was a lie; what was sought was impiety and blasphemy in the highest degree.

Where Satan so signally failed with Jesus, how signally does he succeed with the sons of men! How speedily and how surely do his gilded baits take fast hold of his 'silly captives!' With what strong credulity are his lies believed! How cheerfully are his claims met, and willing homage rendered! He is indeed 'the god of this world,' with a retinue strong and numerous, composed of the three great classes over whom the three great ruling powers are 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.' To all these he awards the triple crown of vanity, vexation, and everlasting contempt.

To get the world is to worship Satan, in some form

or other. 'It is certainly here suggested that submission to Satan is the way to worldly possessions. "I will give thee the world," says the EVIL ONE, "if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Is it not a general truth that man must prostrate all that is divine in his soul to material and selfish impulses if he would gain much of the world; that the highest prizes of Mammon are awarded to souls on their knees in the dust before Diabolus? Diabolus holds almost an absolute dominion. Everywhere the material is in the ascendency; the body with its five senses is on the throne; intellect, genius, and even conscience, are its serfs. And everywhere is the Divine will subordinated to the human. Alas! the world has fallen down, and is on its knees before Satan.' *

* Dr Thomas.

The Voice of the Past.

1 PETER IV. 3.

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles.

IFE! What mystery is wrapped up in life! How great the power needed to originate it! Great is the power of man; almost exhaustless his resources of ingenuity and muscular force. But the power that can erect pyramids and palaces, bridge rivers, almost annihilate time and space, through the wonders of electricity, has not yet discovered means whereby to resuscitate the vanished life even of an insect. The whole of inanimate nature, with all its marvels of revelation and divine power, does not perhaps furnish a lesson of instruction comparable to the living, moving wonders of a drop of water. What consummate skill, what exquisite perfection and beauty of workmanship, are revealed in the organic structures of

creature-life, residing in a mere globular world! We need not wonder that the Psalmist should, by way of an expressive pre-eminence, call upon '*everything that hath* BREATH' to '*praise the Lord.*'

What transcendent worth, then, must belong to *human* life!—to

'OUR LIFE.' We read of the Creator speaking dead and shapeless matter into beautiful formations, and by the working of a divine manipulation calling into existence the creature-life of all that moved in air, earth, and sea. But when the sacred historian would record the masterpiece of the divine workmanship, he tells us that 'God breathed into man the breath of life, and man became a living soul'—'fearfully and wonderfully made,' even as regards his bodily organization, but as respects his sublime relationship to the Author of life, and to the ages of interminable being, a creature marvellous and fearful begotten by the breath of Him who is the Father of everlasting ages.

'*Our* life' is *redeemed* life. It was great to speak a world from nought. It was greater to create moral life, and fashion it after the divine and high original. It was greatest to redeem. To create life required, so to speak, but a word, a touch, a breath; but to redeem life was a work so stupendously great that it demanded the mysteries of the incarnation, the long and protracted stages of the Saviour's humiliation, sufferings, death, and resurrection! What infinite and unutterable value

must belong to human life! 'Our life' is the only life, of which we have any knowledge, for which a ransom has been paid!—and what a ransom! We wonder not, then, at the Redeemer's words, in which He has given to us His own estimate of human worth,—'For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away.'

'THE PAST OF LIFE.' How little we know of the past—taking the word in its broad and comprehensive relationship to the world! As a question of history we know something of the world's civilization, science, art, human laws and governments, human thoughts and actions. But what do we know of the individual experience of mankind—its joys and sorrows—the swelling surges of human emotions of ever-varying moods, which, like successive waves of ocean, have swiftly chased each other over the broad surface of humanity, for the space of six thousand years! And oh! what an impenetrable veil lies between that past and us as respects the moral and eternal consequences of wasted life—the *irrecoverable past*—extending over so many generations, and affecting in each generation so many millions of immortal souls! We thank God that He has thus concealed from us this past! We thank Him, more, that it is not *our* past!

But there *is* a past for which God holds us responsible—an *individual* past—

'THE TIME PAST OF OUR LIFE.' Nothing that I have is my own. I belong to God, in body, soul, and spirit. In Him I live, and move, and have my being. I am, therefore, accountable to Him for my *time*. Life is God's *loan* to man, and time man's 'life-rent of the world.' That loan has been granted on one great condition; that it be returned with *interest:* otherwise forfeited—taken from him. In the great day we are to stand before God to give an account of our stewardship, when the faithful will be able to say, 'Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds;' while to the unfaithful the message will go forth, '*Take from him* the talent, and give to him that hath ten talents.' The 'life-rent' which the great Proprietor claims is *service*. He has put us into His beautiful world to make it more beautiful by adding *moral* to material beauty. If we fail to render this service we shall *lose* our life, in a sense which human language is not adequate to express. 'He that loveth his life shall *lose* it.' Life is God's property, and from every one of us, sooner or later, He will '*require*' it at our hands, either to glorify it with a life, the lease of which will never run out, or to judge it by leaving it to its self-chosen death. 'God *requireth* that which is *past*'—'the time past of our life.' Equally to the saved and unsaved will the words one day have a stirring application,—'This night thy soul shall be required of thee.' God forbid that any one of us should be addressed, in that day, as—'*Thou fool!*' Rather be it our lot, when the voice of God shall call, to reply to it

with the same confidence as that of the child Samuel, who with a true faith, and obedient heart, and a love that knew no fear, rushed into the presence of his father, saying, '*Here am I, for thou didst call me!*'

'And now, what have we to say with respect to this strange, solemn thing—Time?—that men do with it through life just what the apostles did for one precious irreparable hour of it, in the garden of Gethsemane—*they go to sleep!* Have you ever seen those marble statues, in some public square, or garden, which art has so fashioned into a perennial fountain, that through the lips, or through the hands, the clear water flows in a perpetual stream, on and on for ever; and the marble stands there—passive, cold, making no effort to arrest the gliding water? It is so that time flows through the hands of men—swift, never pausing, till it has run itself out; and there is the man petrified into a marble sleep, not feeling what it is which is passing away for ever! It is so, just so, that the destiny of nine men out of ten accomplishes itself, slipping away from them—aimless, till it is too late.'*

May not the children of God apply to themselves, in some measure, these sentiments of stirring reproof? Have we not too often allowed time to slip through our hands, when those hands might have arrested the vital current, and turned it to living water for our own refreshment, and that of others? How much of this pre-

* Robertson.

cious capital have we thrown away! With an improvident expenditure the golden coin has been squandered —our substance wasted! What opportunities have we lost! What privileges forfeited! What work for God neglected! How many precious hours have we given to enervating repose, which might have been spent amidst sacred communings, or in holy and blessed activities! How often has our absence from the sanctuary, or the hallowed place 'where prayer is wont to be made,' rehearsed in our experience the mournful event in the history of Thomas, who was not with his fellow-disciples when the Lord appeared! How many tears have fallen which our sympathy might have helped to dry up! How many hearts have been wounded which we have failed to heal! How many souls perished without hope whose last dark hours might have been illumined, had we carried to them the torch of eternal truth—the lamp of immortality! And all this unimproved and unredeemed 'past' is gone from us, to return no more for ever. 'Like water spilt on the ground, it cannot be gathered up again.' And the time which we *now* have is *passing*. Time present will soon be time past!

'Like the rivers, time is gliding;
Brightest hours have no abiding:
Use the golden moments well.
Life is wasting,
Death is hasting:
Death consigns to heaven or hell.'

The secret of all the failures which have been enumerated is expressed by the apostle in one word—*self-will*—'the will of the Gentiles.' Man doing his own will is the history of the world's sin and woe. There are two great supreme wills in the universe—God's and Satan's; and these are infinitely opposed. The devil's success with man was in drawing off his will from God, and securing for himself its allegiance. The whole of the earth's subsequent history, as regards moral evil, is the history of that will in action—the conduct of those who find it no easy thing to 'recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.'

The workings of this will are as manifold and varied as are the phases of human character. They show themselves alike in the animal, the intellectual, the secular, and the religious nature of man. The children of God know but little of the various and subtle forms which self-will assumes. Adoption into the family of God does not exempt us from its insidious workings. So long as we carry about with us a body of sin and of death, so long shall we need the words of admonition, written by an apostle, and addressed to believers, 'Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind [will], that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.'

What a sublime example is presented for our imitation in the character and life of Jesus, of perfect and

spotless conformity to the will of God! 'He pleased not himself.' He had meat to eat that the world knew not of. His language was, 'My meat is to do the *will* of him that sent me:' 'I delight to do *thy will*, O God.'

'The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' asks us to let the past '*suffice* to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,' to *renew* our early vows, our first love, our young and ardent zeal, to be henceforth inspired with the holy ambition to be '*conformed to the image of his Son.*'

To attain unto this we must yield our wills to God. Satan conquered man by man doing Satan's will. Christ conquered Satan by doing God's will. And every accession to the Redeemer's kingdom, and every diminution of Satanic power, and every measure of increase of the fruits of the Spirit, in the life of the new-born soul —of love, joy, and peace—is the consequence of man *surrendering his will to God.*

What are we living for? for *God* or for *self?* If for God, our being is encircled by a halo of glory which shall be ever expanding with the revolving ages of eternity. But if for self, our life must prove a failure, and our eternity the dark covering of eternal shame.

Soul Culture.

2 PETER III. 18.

Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

GROWTH implies life, and life is essentially expansive. In vegetable life we have 'first the blade; then the ear; and then the full corn in the ear:' first the almost imperceptible sproutings of life; then the fuller growth; then the bud; and lastly the expanding flower. So in human life: first the child, with his little undeveloped intellect; then the youth, with his beautifully enlarging powers of thought; then matured manhood, with full-orbed brow, and richly-stored mind. In material nature, also, we have first the gray dawn; afterwards the cool light of early morning, preceding the radiant glory of the sun in its fervent heat. 'The path of the just is as the shining

light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'

The words are suggestive of two thoughts: that growth implies life, and that life requires culture.

LIFE is implied. The Apostle Paul speaks of two kinds of life: the 'carnal' and the 'spiritual'—'the flesh' and the 'spirit.' The one is utterly bad; the other perfectly good. From the one spring 'the works of the flesh;' the other produces 'the fruits of the Spirit.' The one resembles the tree to which of old the Saviour drew near, seeking fruit but finding none; and whose anathema respecting it was but the designed rebuke to man in his inability to bring forth any '*good thing*.' 'In me (that is, in my *flesh*) dwelleth no *good* thing.'

The other life is that which is altogether perfect—which can bring forth only good—which makes all who have it perfect, as it respects justification,—which gives to us the explanation of Paul's words, 'Ye are *complete* in him;' and of the words of John, who says, 'He that is born of God cannot sin.'

There is a sense, therefore, in which we cannot culture spiritual life. The bad cannot be made good, nor can the divinely good be improved. God has laid aside the bad, and introduced the good. He has found man to be a barren tree; and has brought forward 'the plant of renown,' of His own 'right-hand planting.' To culture this new life is to bring into subjection the bad

—to keep it 'under,' as thorns are kept under, that the plant may have free and full growth.

Life is characterized by two great properties—*receiving* and *giving*. The soil receives the germ of life—the *seed*. Here observe a radically important distinction. The seed and the ground are totally different things. The seed is the life. It may be planted in a good or bad soil, but the life of the seed is 'in itself.'

No cultivation of the soil can produce the seed. Cultivation may keep down or keep out the weeds, but it can impart no germinal life. Sinful humanity is the corrupt soil, which no human means, whether secular or religious, can make fruitful unto God. Human agencies may 'make a fair show in the flesh' by digging, manuring, and refining the soil of human nature, but the extent of all such efforts is only the tillage of ground which will never produce anything, however refined, but a crop of weeds. To bring forth *fruit* man must be 'born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, which liveth and abideth for ever.' As the ground must receive the seed, the heart must receive Christ. The seed is the *life*. Christ is *the life*—'Christ our Life.' The seed brings forth fruit '*after its kind*.' 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.'

This is the list of '*fruit*'—not of weeds; of the fruit of the 'Spirit'—not of the 'flesh.' It is also fruit to be got by *culture;* and the culture consists in

doing with our corrupt life what Paul did with his—'keeping it under, and bringing it into subjection,' that the apostle's rejoicing and confidence may be ours.

There are four things indispensably requisite to the growth of plants—light, heat, moisture, and air. The elements essential to the growth of spiritual life are analogous.

There must be *light*. The Word of God is to the growth of a soul as necessary as light to vegetation. Translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, the Christian is to 'walk in the light' as a child of the light. To do this he must know what light is, and what darkness is, and how to distinguish between the two. The line of demarcation is readily made by a knowledge of the Scriptures. There are but two channels that God has furnished us with, through which light can flow into the soul—the Word, and the Spirit of God. In ancient time the divine communications were the direct teachings of the Spirit. In later time they flowed through the lips of prophets. Later still God spake 'through his Son.' United into one, as streams into a river, we have now the united testimony—the blended light of 'Moses and the prophets,' of Christ and His apostles; which as a clear mirror we look into—towards which, as to a Sun, we direct the eye of the soul—learning how to 'cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh,' and how to direct our feet into the way of Truth and holiness; while with

hearts filled with 'the joy of the Lord,' we resemble bright and radiant flowers, looking into the face of the sun, and saying—'*A pleasant thing it is to behold the light!*'

To culture spiritual life, therefore, we must cultivate a deeper acquaintance with 'the Word of God.' To 'grow in *grace*' we must grow in '*knowledge*,' pursuing our investigations of divine truth with the earnestness and zeal demanded by the gathering clouds of ever-increasing error and evil, and with the ever-growing conviction that the most effective means to put out darkness is to let the light shine clearly and steadily—that the 'powers of darkness' can be met and opposed only by the powers of light.

There must be also *heat*. Knowledge without life—truth without *love*—resembles a frosty moonlight. Flowers open to the sun, and hearts open to Christ, when the constraining power of His love is felt as a burning heat. The parent-weed of the heart is selfishness, with manifold ramifications. To kill weeds is no easy task, but one thing can do it; light cannot, but *heat* can. Weeds wither 'when the sun is risen with a scorching heat.' So does selfishness before love.

Weeds do two things: they dwarf the growth of plants, and obscure their beauty. Selfishness does likewise: it makes the Christian morally what Zaccheus was physically, 'little of stature,' the tall and prolific weeds doing with the soul what the thronging crowd

did with the person of Jesus; shutting out from the view of the world what ought to be the reflected image of Christ. Selfishness is the deadly upas, distilling on all hands its double-distilled poison, and impregnating the atmosphere with its foul, chilling, and withering exhalations.

To check the growth of this weed the heart as well as the mind must be influenced: the growth of 'grace' must keep pace with that of 'knowledge.' The soul must build its conservatory on the south side of the temple of Truth, the windows of the mind and the doors of the heart both having their frontage looking towards Calvary. This will make the soul of the Christian a divine *sunflower.*

Moisture is essential to the growth of plants. In rain and dew the tree receives those influences without which neither beauty nor fruitfulness can exist.

What moisture is to vegetation the Spirit of God is to soul-growth. Like the dew of flowers and 'rain on the mown grass,' the operations of the Spirit make the heart blossom with the 'beauties of holiness,' and the life yield its summer fruit of holy activities and heavenly graces.

Without this power of the Spirit the heart becomes a barren waste, a sandy desert, no green leaf of celestial verdure, nor fruit of Christlike love, appearing to relieve the dry and cheerless plain. To such a state of moral destitution the charge brought against Israel is signifi-

cantly applicable. 'Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.' But baptized with 'the unction of the Holy One' as an indwelling guest, the soul becomes like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth fruit in its season, and whose leaf withers not.' The heart is converted into a garden, the life is richly laden with pendent fruit, and the conscience falters not in saying, 'Herein is my Father glorified—in much fruit.'

To the growth and healthiness of vegetation there must be *air*. 'Of all common things, air is the most common. No space or place is accessible to us that is not filled with it. It is, of all material wants, that which is most incessantly indispensable to our existence. Food is an occasional want; an intermitting supply is all that is needed. Clothing may, in certain cases, be dispensed with, and habit may inure us to a deficiency of it. The want of warmth must become extreme to become fatal. But the privation of air, even for a brief interval, is attended with instant and certain death.'

The character of a tree, plant, or flower will be determined by the air of the neighbourhood where it is planted. Impure air will affect the vitality of a plant as truly as it does the lungs of an animal. Hence the force of the illustration with its moral and spiritual application. 'The life of God in the soul of man' cannot thrive save in an atmosphere somewhat congenial with its heavenly character. It must move in an air

higher and purer than that of earth. We must know what it is to have 'fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,' and with His saints. To 'grow in grace' we must surround ourselves with the elements of a divine life. It is said of a certain insect that it always reflects the colour of the leaf on which it feeds. The leaf exhaling an atmosphere congenial with the nature of the little organic creature, surrounds it with an element that imparts nourishment, and gives to it its own hue and colour. It is so with the soul. The character and complexion of our daily life will be the natural result and outgrowth of the company we keep, the society in which we move, the religious atmosphere we breathe. 'Art thou any kind of tree,' said an eastern sage to a lump of odoriferous earth, which he picked up in a grove, 'thou charmest me with thy perfume.' It answered him, 'I am only a vile piece of earth, but I dwelt some time with the *rose*.' Our Christian life should convert fable into a divine and beautiful reality. In ourselves we are but 'vile earth,' but 'in Christ' we are made 'partakers of the divine nature,' and by increasing cultivation of the society and fellowship of Him who is 'the Rose of Sharon,' and whose name is 'as ointment poured forth,' *God* will 'make our lives sublime,' and man will feel their savoury influence. Thus shall we become the distributors as well as the recipients of a blessed atmosphere, while from day to day, and hour by hour, we replenish our vital resources by breathing forth the heart's invocation,

'Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out!'

The second property of life, already referred to, is that of *giving*. The flower gives its fragrance and loveliness; the plant its nourishment and healing; the tree its shadow and fruit. The animal gives its strength of sinew, bone, and muscle. Man does the same, with the additional contribution of intellectual strength.

Without this giving forth there would be no true or perfect development of life. Particularly would this be the case with the human animal. The mind uneducated, or educated and afterwards allowed to remain inactive, would be a mind imperfect in its development. The muscular capabilities of the body, unused to labour, make a body of deficient growth.

It is so in the moral world. The man that lives for self is a man of stunted growth. A Christian that lives for self is a spiritual dwarf. The Creator has endowed us with faculties high and noble—of intellect, heart, soul, strength, money, time. To be '*men*,' in the sublime sense of the word, we must grow in the *use* of these endowments—using them for God and for souls. And doing so, we shall grow 'strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.'

Let our ambition be so to live and so to grow, that when we pass away from the activities of time, we may

go to the higher activities of heaven, to complete in eternity what in time we began—*the ceaseless growth and interminable progress of a soul in divine* LOVE *and* KNOWLEDGE.

What is your Age?

1 JOHN II. 12—14.

I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

UMAN life has a fourfold division—childhood, youth, mature age, and grey hairs. Three of these classes are illustrative of spiritual life. In certain relations the whole four are so. But in the particular aspect of truth contained in the text the fourth is omitted. Old age is a beautiful type when a long life of Christian experience crowns it with spiritual honours, and when, like ripened corn, the soul draws near to the grave ready for the reaper's sickle. But as

a type of Christian life in its active and vigorous character, old age has no place in the language of Scripture. In knowledge and experience the Christian may be old, but in feebleness and loss of strength, he should never resemble the condition of extreme age. Perhaps this was intended to be suggested in the text by the omission of the fourth and last stage of human life as a type. The child is to grow into the strength of youth; the youth into the ripened experience of the parent; but mature manhood must never degenerate into the sickliness and imbecility of grey hairs. In the Book of Revelation Christ is represented with His head 'white like wool, as white as snow;' and in Canticles He is seen by the eye of the bride with His 'locks bushy, black as the raven's.' As the 'everlasting Father' He is hoary with years; but as the Unchangeable, and the eternally strong One, He has the dew of immortal youth. Perpetual strength should characterize the Christian. He is to be ever 'growing up into Christ,' advancing 'from strength to strength,' growing in divine knowledge and love, forsaking childhood for youth, and yet retaining the child's moral likeness: passing from youth to manhood, but never losing the strength and vigour of the young man.

Here, then, we have suggested a very common inquiry, with a very uncommon application—'What is your age?' What Pharaoh asked of Jacob, respecting the years of his earthly pilgrimage, the Apostle John asks of every child of faith—'*How old art thou?*'

THE FIRST STAGE.

'*I write unto you,* LITTLE CHILDREN, *because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.*' The first and most momentous question for the soul is—Do I belong to the divine family? By creation I am a child of God. Am I such by grace? Have I yet been 'born from above,' and made to take my place among God's 'little children'? To this question we are furnished with an answer in the words before us.

To belong to the divine family is to have our sins put away. 'I write unto you, little children, *because your sins are forgiven.*' Sin has robbed man of his birthright. To restore this lost relationship the Infinite Father has provided a way whereby sin is removed and cancelled, and a new and divine 'right' secured to 'the tree of life.' It is in Christ—'*for his name's sake.*' 'As many as received him, to them gave he power (or 'right') to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on *his name*' (John i. 12). 'Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that *through this man* is preached unto you the *forgiveness of sins;* and *by him* all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses' (Acts xiii. 38, 39). Such is the ground on which God can carry on a correspondence with the sinner. All His words are His writings *to us.* He addresses us, saying—'I write unto you; I carry on a correspondence with you; I have fellowship with you—

because your sins are forgiven you;' because of this 'I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.'

Our knowledge of this truth depends on the measure of our faith in the divine writings. They whose sins are forgiven them are *declared* to be the children of God. Childlike faith believes the declaration. It rests on divine authority. A little child knows himself a child, even when he cannot understand the relationship, because he is called such by the parent, by one in whose word he has unbounded confidence. The little child's faith is, in many respects, the highest type of Christian faith. As soon as a child begins to doubt, and reason, and question, the beauty of the child's faith is forfeited. Faith in the divine parent should resemble faith in the human parent. The ground of the soul's confidence before God should be based exclusively on faith in His word. We are to know our sins forgiven, not because of the opinions of others about us; not because of our opinions about ourselves; not because of our apparent conformity of life to certain divine precepts; nor because of our 'frames and feelings;' but because of the unerring testimony that assures us that 'he that believeth on the Son of God *hath* everlasting life.' 'And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even *eternal life*.' Whenever God's writings are addressed to 'little children' they carry with them fulness of satisfaction. Satan does with unbelieving souls what the disciples sought to do with the children that were brought by their mothers to Jesus

that He might bless them. Unbelief, doubting, and questioning are the great '*forbidding*' forces that will not '*suffer*' the soul to come unto Christ for the blessing and kiss of peace. But there is one class the devil cannot hinder. To such the words still are—'Suffer the *little children* to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'

THE SECOND STAGE.

'*I write unto you,* YOUNG MEN, *because ye have overcome the wicked one.*' Difficulties that easily overpower the child are soon 'overcome' through the strength of nerve and muscle wielded by the youthful athlete, who by the constant exercise of his physical powers possesses a threefold energy compared with many of his companions. 'Exercise thyself unto godliness,' writes Paul to Timothy. Compared with 'godliness' 'bodily exercise profiteth little.' *Exercised* by godliness we are 'prepared like a strong man to run a race,' and to illustrate the growth of the 'Holy child Jesus,' of whom it is written—'*The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit.*'

There are not a few of God's children of whom, after years of Christian profession, nothing more can be said than that 'their sins are forgiven them.' They seem contented to remain 'babes in Christ.' They have learned the rudiments of the gospel, and mastered the first principles of Christianity; but have made no further advance. They are still children in growth, in knowledge, and in strength.

'Some of God's children,' says an American author, 'seem to have attained unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. They are full-grown men, can bear a man's burden, and do a man's work. These favoured ones look down on the storm; they have pitched their tents higher than the clouds can climb, and live on that sunny summit where the darkness and the light no more divide the day. Others of God's children seem to be stunted from the birth. If they grow at all it is so slowly as not to be perceptible to an ordinary eye. I have seen a child nearly twenty years old in a cradle; and I have seen a Christian who numbered as many years of the new life, in a cradle. He never leaves the cradle, eating only as he is fed, and sleeping only as he is rocked, living for no purpose unless it be that others may have something to do. *Cradle Christians!* The Church of God is full of them.'

The 14th verse gives us the explanation of this. 'Ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you.' Milk is the best food for 'babes,' but if 'strong meat' be not added for the growth of after years, the child will never become a man in strength. 'The Word of God' read, marked, and inwardly digested, is to the vigour of the soul what strong meat is to the body. The mightiest words will be deprived of their force if they find no permanent lodgment in the minds and hearts of the hearers. It is so with the divine word. Heard with the outward ear only it will be robbed of its might; but received into the heart, loved, cherished,

and made the stamina of the soul, it will render us strong, 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might'—strong to labour, strong in duty and in temptation, strong to 'overcome the wicked one,' and enable us daily to '*renew* our strength,' and to quit ourselves 'like men.'

By 'the Word of God' a second truth is suggested. It was the favourite expression of John in designating the character of Christ. 'In the beginning was the Word:' 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' Regarding the expression thus we are reminded of the fact that youth is the time of strong *affections*. According to the character of the object on which the heart is set, is the character of the strength called forth. What difficulties are 'overcome' when a strong affection kindles the fire of opposition! A thought, a word, an object, takes possession of the heart, and there it 'abides' with a love strong as death, with a hold firm and sure as the grave.

Hence the secret of soul-strength. 'The love of Christ constraineth us'—inspires the affections, becomes the sceptre of the heart; and by it we 'overcome' the world. The lesser light is eclipsed by the greater, the human is weakened by the divine, the earthly supplanted by the heavenly.

To 'overcome the world,' and to overcome 'the wicked one,' are expressions that must be taken in conjunction, as used by the apostle in the text and context.

In this relation they mean the same thing. 'The world lieth in the hand of the wicked one.' To overcome 'the wicked one' is to overcome the 'world.'

Guard here against a popular fallacy. By the world we are not to understand the material world. Nothing that God ever made was forbidden to be loved. 'He hath made everything beautiful in his season.' The beauties of the earth, its flowers and fruits, its mountains and valleys, its rivers and green pastures, are things which no eye but a deranged eye can look upon without admiration and love. They are the creations of divine wisdom and goodness; nor would the great parent have expended so much care in their formation had He not intended them for the use and enjoyment of His children. Hence the 16th verse is the explanation of the interdiction of the preceding one. That which is forbidden to be loved is the 'lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.' These are the seductive influences of the 'wicked one.' The covetous 'eye' beheld the forbidden tree; the 'flesh' lusted after its fruit; and 'pride' of wisdom and power urged the temptation—'Ye shall be as gods!' Thus did the world in the hand of the wicked one 'overcome' our first parents. Many generations afterwards 'the second man, the Lord from heaven,' was 'led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.' The 'flesh' was weak through hunger, and Satan sought to make it 'lust' after food. Failing in this, the tempter presented to the eye 'the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them,'

with the prospect of unbounded might. In the power of the Spirit the Saviour 'overcame the world' and vanquished the 'wicked one.' And the words of His servant John are His words of commendation to all His faithful ones—'*I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*'

THE THIRD STAGE.

'*I have written unto you,* FATHERS, *because ye have known him that is from the beginning.*' With a slight variation of language, the same thing is said to the 'fathers' as to the 'children.' In the last clause of the 13th verse it is said, 'I have written unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.' And to the 'fathers' it is—'I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning,' or, as it might be rendered—'Him who is the everlasting Father.' The first element of the child's knowledge is the knowledge of its parent: among its earliest utterances is the word 'father;' and from the moment it is able to speak the loved name, it begins to advance in the knowledge of the father's character, in the experience of the father's heart. But this knowledge and experience are never complete till the child becomes a father: then only is he prepared to know the heart of a father. As a child he knew something of a father's wisdom, goodness, and sympathy; and every year confirmed and strengthened the knowledge; but now that

he has assumed the responsibilities of a parent, and has entered experimentally into the thoughts and feelings of a parent, does he receive a clear and perfect illustration of what he before knew chiefly in theory. He now gets something like a full idea of the words of the Divine parent—'As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.'

The measure of our knowledge and experience in spiritual things determines the measure of our soul-strength. The devil always takes advantage of imperfect knowledge, and of small experience. He who is only half convinced of a truth will be easily persuaded to renounce it altogether. He who has but short acquaintance with a friend will the more readily lose confidence in him when the slightest suspicions are aroused. But when truths have grown up with us from childhood to youth, from youth to maturity of judgment, from manhood to old age—it is then a difficult thing to uproot them from our minds; nor is it an easy thing to lose confidence in one whose friendship has been tested through a life-long companionship, with whom the soul has been 'knit together in love' as the heart of one man, as the hearts of David and Jonathan.

Such is the strength of the believer's confidence in his God, after a protracted course of Christian experience. His experience makes him a father in grace. When first planted among the 'trees of righteousness' he was as a mere sapling; his faith and love were easily shaken by adverse events, 'as a reed is shaken by the

wind;' but now he is rooted in faith, and grounded *in love.* Winds blow, storms rage, and floods overflow; but like a sturdy oak 'his strength is firm, trusting in God.' Amidst all circumstances and at all times he can say—'*I am not alone, for the Father is with me,*' and—

'His love in times past
Forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last
In trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer
I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure
To help me quite through.'

The Voyage.

JONAH I. 3—5.

But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and he was fast asleep.

UMAN life resembles a voyage. 'What is your life?' asks the apostle. In answer to the question many are the emblems and metaphors of Scripture. It is compared to a vapour, to smoke, to a breath, to a flower, to a candle, and to many other things. But among the most frequent figures used by both inspired and uninspired writers is that of the sea and the vessels that sail on its bosom. Hence the

common use of such expressions as these:—the ocean of life, the sea of life, the tide of life, the waters of life, the river of life.

Human life is a voyage.

'Events are floating waves that onward roll,
And providence the tide that doth control
The ocean life: the bark the human soul:
The word of God the chart by which we steer:
Conscience the watch on deck when danger's near:
The rock traced clearly on the chart is sin:
Hope is the anchor cast the vail within:
The cable, the sure promises of God:
The wake, the separate path by each that's trod:
Reason, the rudder: Faith, the magnet true:
And Heaven the harbour to be kept in view.
Jesus as pilot at the helm doth stand:
The Spirit is the breeze that wafts to land:
The sails to catch the breeze, the means of grace:
The masts, occasions given for their embrace.
Our days to number is the log to heave:
Our age, the rate of vessel through the wave:
Life's pulse, the line the water's depths to find:
The crew, the thoughts and feelings of the mind:
The freight of holy tempers, rich supplies
Intended for the harbour of the skies:
Death the last billow, soon to break on shore:
Eternity, the coast where time's no more.'

How dark and deep are the depths of ocean! What mysteries belong to its undiscovered and unfathomed caves! What lost life! What buried treasures! What sunken gold! What precious pearls!

Such is human life. Notwithstanding all the

blessed light of the gospel, what deep and perplexing mysteries characterize the history of human souls! But while the eye of sense cannot dive to these depths, and solve the inscrutable ways of the Infinite, the keen eye of faith can and does discern the hidden wealth yet to be unfolded when the hand of Love shall be put forth to drain the Dead Sea of sin of its dark and bitter streams; and the voice of Love shall declare that there shall be '*no more sea.*'

How tempestuous is the ocean! 'Deep calleth unto deep,' while, amid the noise of united winds and boiling billows, strong and gallant ships are tossed about like the froth and foam of waves. 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep: for he commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof: they mount up to the heaven; they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble: they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end.'

Such is human life. It is everywhere, in one form or another, the counterpart of the picture given in the Gospel of Mark of the disciples out at sea, 'toiling in rowing' against 'contrary winds.' What multitudes on the great ocean of life are called to battle with the 'contrary winds' of perverse natures, and of opposing circumstances! See them '*toiling in rowing!*' Look at yon lonely widow, bereft, or it may be abandoned, of her

children! Surely the ocean on which she sails is deep with mystery, and the night dark, and the storm loud, as we see her frail bark 'tossed about and not comforted.' Behold yon orphan! alone in the world—out at sea, and *alone!* She is trying to steer her small craft through the hard and difficult tasks of daily duties and hourly worries. One thing only keeps her head above water, and saves the little boat from sinking. It is in the stimulating and comforting words, 'Be of good cheer,' —words borne on the breeze and carried through the storm, from the lips of Jesus as He stands 'on the land,' and sees how hard it is for her, and for many others, to pilot their course through the contrary elements of harsh voices, and unsympathizing looks, and cross tempers, which beat like waves and winds against poor and weak dependence, in the nursery, behind the counter, or in the kitchen.

How dangerous is the sea! What sunken rocks, and reefs, and quicksands! What noble vessels, with their costly cargoes, have struck and foundered here!

Such is human life. Lust, intemperance, godless associates, meeting-places of sinful amusements, infidelity, scepticism, and every other form of unbelief,—all these are rocks and quicksands. In many instances they are sunken rocks. The danger is not apprehended. The vessel strikes unawares. The leak is not discovered, and the reef is not seen, till too late. How many a noble boy, like a noble boat, has in this way suffered

shipwreck! How many a young man has perished here, allured by the fire of a bright intellect to despise the chart of God's Word, and to steer his course by the delusive and wandering light of human reason!

Beware of the rocks! And in these days, specially, when the helm of a simple faith is being abandoned; and the chart of Scripture is being cast overboard; and the compass is allowed to be regulated by 'wandering stars,'—see to it that ye '*perish not with them that believe not.*'

> 'Sure a time will come
> For storms to try thee, and strong blasts to rend
> Thy painted sails, and spread thy gold like chaff
> O'er the wild wave; and what a wreck—
> If judgment find thee unsustain'd by God!'

What Jonah was to the ship of Tarshish sin is to the soul. The sea's restlessness and the disquietude of the mariners were owing to Jonah being in his wrong place —sailing to Tarshish instead of journeying to Nineveh. *Sin is restlessness!* Wherever you find it you find disquiet. It is so physically, intellectually, morally, socially, in individuals, families, Churches, nations. 'As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.' 'The wicked are like the troubled sea that cannot rest.' Man has lost his true centre of gravitation—his proper equipoise and balance. God is rest: distance from God is distance from rest.

Jonah sought to flee from '*the presence of the Lord.*'

The 'presence of the Lord' is Light, Purity, and Peace. Away from that presence is darkness, sin, and misery.

The world's unrest is being made signally manifest at the present time, in two particulars: the unrest of the *intellect*, and the unrest of the *heart*. The only power that can meet this unrest is 'the presence of the Lord.' Would we be right on great theological and social questions? we must see truth in the light of the Lord. Would we have our consciences at ease, and our hearts becalmed? we must know and taste the love of God. The revelation of God's mind is the Bible. The revelation of God's heart is Jesus. We need not wonder therefore at the world's unrest when we remember that the two prime religious features of the times are rationalism and sacerdotalism: the one seeking to construct a theology without the Bible; the other to establish a religion without Christ.

We are told that before Jonah sailed for Tarshish he 'paid the fare' of the voyage. What fare? The price of fleeing from 'the presence of the Lord.' And a costly 'fare' it was, as we learn from the subsequent record. Had he gone to Nineveh, he could have gone without payment; and would have had 'the presence of the Lord' to conduct him thither, and found rest to his soul when he got there, and been able to sing in the face of apprehended danger: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom [illegible]id?'

God's rest is 'without money and without price.' The devil's unrest must be paid for. 'Eternal life' is a '*gift*.' Death is '*wages*.' Look into the face of intemperance, lust, and evil passions, and read the heavy payment of sin! Follow the multitude of pleasure-hunters in their nightly rounds of dissipation, and read in the pale faces and jaded limbs the costly fare which all must pay who are 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.' Go to the prison, the hulks, the penitentiary, and behold in broken hearts, and blighted hopes, and wrecked bodies, the heavy wages of sin! The voyage from 'the presence of the Lord' is one of tempest, danger, and loss, and yet for the opportunity of making it men will pay any price, to the bartering of soul and body, and to the risk of absolute shipwreck on the shores of a dark eternity.

'*Every man cried to his god.*' It is 'a rebuke to atheism that they believed in a God: it is a proof of their heathenism that they had "*gods many.*"' It is to be feared that to the eye of God and of angels the religious world furnishes a moral counterpart of this picture. Pagans have their manifold deities: we have our manifold sects, and parties, and denominations. Some are 'of Paul, and some of Apollos, and some of Cephas.' And not a few practically attach as much importance to the name of their sect as they do to Christ Himself. Alas! I have heard of parents and religious teachers who have made greater lamentations

over one who had abandoned a particular religious congregation for another, than they would have done over the soul's absolute apostasy from God. And yet what will these religious distinctions do for us in the end? As much and no more than the assistance rendered to these mariners when 'every man cried to his god,' and found no answer.

Observe another thing they did: *they 'cast the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it.'* Vain the costly sacrifice! The precious cargo went down to the depths, but the depths were not thereby silenced from uttering their wailings.

What a vain, yet costly expenditure has the great ocean of life witnessed in connection with religion! Go to India. Behold yon religious devotee! For long weeks and weary months his limbs have been distorted, till they are of no more use than mere logs of wood. He has felt the storm of sin in his soul, and in the hope of stilling the tumult of his conscience, he has sacrificed the precious freight of bodily strength. Or see yon lone woman at the brink of the great river! She, too, has felt the storm, and seeks to lighten the heavy burden of the sin-laden ship by casting her infant to the crocodiles. And now look *at home.* See a multitude of so-called Christians immuring themselves in convents and monasteries, to give themselves to washings, and fastings, and painful penances: assuming the garb of a spiritual widowhood when the face should be

radiant with the joy, and the lips attuned to the song, of the Bride of Christ: neglecting the daily duties of life for frequent attendance on humanly-instituted rites, and confessions to a humanly-instituted priesthood; and with rigid carefulness observing saint-days, and holy-days, when to a saint every day should be holy, every place a sanctuary, and every hour inspired with the spirit of a high devotion.

O ye spiritual idolaters; ye who are worshipping and crying to some god which the heart has fashioned; ye who are sacrificing the precious 'wares' wherewith your souls are divinely freighted; ye who are converting the simple, spiritual, and heart-religion of the meek, and lowly, and unostentatious Jesus, into a religion of imposing ceremonies, and chanted prayers, and sacra mental altars, and many-coloured vestments; ye wh are seeking to justify yourselves,—like Jonah's mariners '*rowing hard*,' striving with might and main, but vainly, to bring the vessel of self-righteousness to land,—listen! listen to the 'still small voice' floating from the serene heavens above you: 'Come unto ME, all ye that labour and are *heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*'

Thus let the heart receive Jesus, and He becomes at once the pilot of the soul to steer it into the great 'Pacific Ocean' of divine rest. Invite Jesus to board the vessel, and He will bring with Him the gift of eternal life, and the benediction of His own peace, saying—'*Peace, be still!*'

The Pole Star.

MATTHEW II. 10.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

MPOSSIBLE it is 'for those who have never visited the glowing East to form an adequate idea of the exceeding beauty of an Oriental night. The sky—which bends enamoured over clusters of graceful palm-trees fringing some slow-moving stream, or groves of dark motionless cypresses rising up like Gothic spires from the midst of white flat-roofed villages—is of the deepest, darkest purple, unstained by the faintest film of vapour, undimmed by a single fleecy cloud. It is the very image of purity and peace, idealizing the dull earth with its beauty, elevating sense into the sphere of soul, and suggesting thoughts and yearnings too tender and ethereal to be invested with human language. Through its transparent depths the eye wanders dreamily upwards until it loses itself on the threshold of

other worlds. Over the dark mountain-ranges the lonely moon walks in brightness, clothing the landscape with the pale glories of a mimic day; while the zodiacal light, far more distinct and vivid than it is ever seen in this country, diffuses a mild pyramidal radiance above the horizon, like the after-glow of sunset.'*

Imagine a night like this, eighteeen hundred years back, when the illustrious Magian visitors set out from their homes in the East for Jerusalem, in search of the new-born Messiah; or the night when to the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains an unusual glory appeared, the stillness of their 'night watches' being broken and their devout musings interrupted by a multitude of angelic choristers suddenly appearing and singing—'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.'

These renowned Eastern visitors are designated '*wise men*,' probably from their being philosophers and astronomers. From what particular locality they came —whether from Persia, or Arabia, or Mesopotamia—is uncertain. It would appear that they were not strangers to prophecy, and were probably acquainted with the words of Balaam, who a thousand years before came from Aram, out of the mountains of the East, and uttered this remarkable prophecy—'*There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel.*'

As we know so little certainly about the character of

* Bible Teachings.

these eminent men, we know still less concerning the nature of the celestial luminary which they so devoutly and eagerly followed. It is called a '*star.*' Whether a natural or a supernatural phenomenon we know not. One thing is indisputable, that its appearance was connected with a divine and gracious purpose, and lent inspiration to the faith and energies of the 'wise men,' proving them to be, in the highest spiritual sense of the word—'*wise,*' and adding to their faith a living power and joy which would not let them rest till they had '*found him of whom Moses and the prophets did write —Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.*'

Among numerous lessons suggested by this 'star' we learn—

1. *The pre-eminent character of Jesus.* Whatever was the nature of the star that guided the 'wise men,' it was doubtless an object of superior lustre, distinguishing it from all other constellations in the heavens. It is thus illustrative of the pre-eminence of Christ.

This pre-eminence is seen in the Bible—in the Church—in the heart.

It is seen in the *Bible.* That which distinguishes the Scriptures above all other books is its one great central theme—Jesus! 'Jesus is the back-bone of the Bible,' said a converted pagan. 'The Scriptures are the swaddling-bands of the Holy child Jesus.' He is 'the Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end, the first and the last.' All within the book is written con-

cerning Him, and it is sealed without with seals, and every seal bears the 'image and superscription' of the King's Son. In olden times, it is said, 'kings were accustomed to send messages to one another by means of running footmen, who carried in their hands lighted lamps; and these were met by other footmen, who were stationed at intervals, each one kindling his lamp at the expiring embers of the last; so that the whole row, from one palace to another, was one illuminated avenue —one unbroken line of blazing lamps.' Cast your eye along the sacred avenue of Scripture. See Jehovah coming forth '*in the beginning*,' in the first book of Genesis, to proclaim *light* and to give *life*. Trace the Divine hand from book to book, page to page, dispensation to dispensation, until in the last chapter of the last book of Scripture you behold all dispensations converge into one golden point, and light and life perfected and consummated in that temple of which it is written, 'There shall be no more curse,' and 'there shall be no night there.' Then lift up your eyes to the central seat of this glory, and again read the first and the last letters in the alphabet of Scripture—'*The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.*

The pre-eminence of Christ is seen in the *Church*. The glory of the Bible is Christ. The glory of the Church must be likewise. God hath made Jesus to be '*head over all things to the Church*.' A Bible without Christ would be a Bible without a meaning—a light-

house without a light. And a Church without Christ would be a Church without a foundation—a candlestick without a lighted candle. What is God's chosen symbol of the Church's true position? Seven golden candlesticks arranged round about a divine centre—from which the lights emanate. Some glory in Paul, some in Apollos, others in Cephas, others in types and shadows and outward forms. Paul himself said—'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ.' A Church's glory is worth nothing if it be not the reflected glory of Christ. The Church, like the moon, shines in borrowed light, and if we borrow it from any other object than the 'Sun of Righteousness' God beholds, if we do not, the *eclipse* of our light and beauty. Christ only is 'a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the *glory* of his people Israel.'

The pre-eminence of Christ is seen in the *heart*. Jesus is the 'star' of the Bible—the 'star' of the Church—the 'star' of the heart. Moreover, He is 'the *morning* star.' Who sees the morning star? The wakeful. And who are the wakeful? The watchers—'they that watch for the morning.' And what prompts to watchfulness? *Love!* And where do we look for love all sensitively glowing and keenly watchful? In the expectant and waiting Bride! And what thus rules the heart? It is the *sceptre* of love. 'There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a *sceptre* out of Israel.' The 'star' and the 'sceptre' must ever go together—

the one to *attract* the heart, the other to *rule* it. The sceptre thus crowned, and the crown thus sceptred, will 'turn away our eyes from beholding vanity,' and keep our hearts from going to sleep. And concerning every such faithful one the Saviour says: '*I will give him the morning star.*' And surely the fulfilment of this promise will be the consummation of the Church's yearnings, and the final answer of her prayers—the divine Bridegroom will *give Himself.* 'Even so come, Lord Jesus,' that 'where thou art there we may be also:' that lifted up from the world's dark night, we may shine with Thee in the kingdom of Thy Father, when Thou shalt come to usher in the '*morning without clouds.*'

2. *The pre-eminent worth of Jesus to the soul's salvation.* What the Apostle Peter says about the Scriptures is beautifully applicable to the Saviour's character. 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, *as unto a light that shineth in a dark place,* until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.' *A light that shineth in a dark place!* How truly descriptive of the Saviour's character and mission on earth! Without Him the spiritual heavens are enveloped in midnight blackness. Until He appeared 'darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.'

He came to let the light shine on the Divine character. 'The world by wisdom knew not God.' 'Clouds

and darkness' concealed his moral glories. Jesus appeared to roll away the clouds—to dispel the darkness—to 'purge our sins,' as mists are purged by the radiant sun—to say, 'Let there be light.' And 'there was light.' That light reveals a God of whom we are not afraid: it is the light of Love. 'The glory of God,' like a mild and lustrous star, 'shines in the face of Jesus Christ.'

He came to let the light shine on the dark ocean of our earthly being—to reveal to us our dangers—the dark depths of our sinfulness—the utter disqualification of a sinful nature for the presence of light and purity—to declare to us the only ground of salvation—the only path of safety: to offer Himself as the Father's great and loving gift—heaven's lifeboat to rescue the perishing, and save from fatal shipwreck.

He came to let the light shine on our future. He 'brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' In this light we see not only what we are, but what we are to be—not only where we are, but whither we are voyaging—the port to which we are hastening. Let us reject this light, and the prospect of death must be the prospect of a '*leap in the dark*,' as the hardened atheist termed it, when on nearing the dark shore of death his dark faith gathered blackness, and he began to tremble at the prospect of a probable *journey* after the voyage, not knowing what dark possibilities might be awaiting his landing on the other side of life's ocean.

An artist once drew a picture. 'It represented a night-scene. A solitary man is rowing a little skiff across a lake; the wind is high and stormy; the billows, white and crested, rage around his frail bark; and not a star, *save one,* shines through the dark and angry sky above. But upon that lone star the voyager fixes his eye, and keeps rowing away—on, on, on, through the midnight storm. Written beneath the picture were these words—"*If I lose that I'm lost!*"'

Brother! you are that lonely voyager on life's rough and dangerous sea. Sin is the dark rock that threatens your ruin. Jesus is your soul's pole-star—'a light that shineth in a dark place'—your *only* light—

> . . . . 'The only star
> By which the bark of man could navigate
> The sea of life, and gain the coast of bliss
> Securely—only star which rose on Time,
> And on its dark and troubled billows still,
> As generation, drifting swiftly by,
> Succeeded generation, threw a ray
> Of heaven's own light, and to the hills of God,
> The eternal hills, pointed the sinner's eye.'

3. *The pre-eminence of Christ as the object of faith.* The faith of these 'wise men,' like its object, was of an illustrious character. They had to encounter difficulties in the pursuit of their object. There were geographical difficulties. History tells us that the path through which they journeyed was beset with dangers, and infested with robbers. There were also intellectual difficulties. A considerable degree of uncertainty at-

tended their mission, and careful inquiries had to be made as to the fact and locality of the Saviour's advent. Yet in spite of these difficulties their faith was strong. Were they living in our day they would laugh at the objections which many so-called wise men raise against the Bible. They were probably rich men, as well as wise, possessing rank and renown. If so their conduct was a sublime commentary on the words of Jeremiah: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches.' Had they given themselves to some mission of vain fancies and wild and extravagant theories, they would have 'laboured in vain and spent their strength for nought.' Or had they occupied their attention with some terrestrial instead of celestial object—looking downward instead of upward, they might have lost their guide and returned home clothed with shame and disappointment. Their interest and gaze were *concentrated.* One star only of all the heavenly host could fix their wondering eyes; and with a gaze thus riveted, they illustrated the literal rendering of the apostle's words—'*Looking* OFF *unto Jesus.*'

4. *The pre-eminence of Christ as the source of joy.* Herod was '*troubled*' by the event that made the wise men *joyful.* The *rejection* of Christ always brings trouble. His *reception* always brings joy. '*When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*' The words denote an ecstasy of joy. Like the joy of

mariners after a tempestuous voyage: like the 'joy of harvest,' when the husbandman's fears are allayed: like the 'morning of joy' that follows the 'night of weeping.' Such is the new-born joy which faith in Christ inspires—'a joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' Such was the joy at Samaria, when Philip 'went down' to that city and preached Christ: '*there was great joy in that city.*' Such was the joy of the eunuch, when, through the same instrumentality, he believed in Jesus, and '*went on his way rejoicing.*' Likewise was it with the Philippian jailor, when he '*rejoiced believing in God with all his house.*' And likewise has it been with countless numbers since, the burden of whose joy has called forth the burden of a song.

'Now safely moor'd—my perils o'er,
I'll sing, first in night's diadem,
For ever and for evermore,
The star!—the star of Bethlehem!'

The Radiant Shore.

REV. VII. 13—15.

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

AS the eye was made for light, the ear for sound, the mouth for speech, the limbs for motion, the wings of a bird for flight, and the fins of a fish for swimming; so are the spiritual aspirations and hopes of humanity the prophecy and the pledge of a life immortal. We instinctively feel that we were made and adapted for it, and should be miserably incomplete without it. We yearn for a life 'where all those aspirations which have beckoned us only to crown us with thorns shall be realized; and where there is no bud that shall

not burst into blossom, and no blossom that shall fall without being filled into fruit. Here we are like plants which the gardener keeps in pots till they are ready to be transplanted. Often we are in every way very much cramped while here; there we shall have root-room, and branch-room, and the promise of our nature shall be more than made good. We shall be made all glorious, and be satisfied with our inheritance.'*

What philosophers have written and poets have sung, amidst anxious doubts and cloudy surmisings, the gospel has made known in clearness and certainty. The light of nature reveals the existence of other worlds: the light of instinct, reason, and conscience give forth strong intimations that man was made for some other state; but it remained for the bright revelation of the gospel of Christ to tell us what that other world is for which we are intended and adapted—what its moral character; what its inhabitants; and how it is to be reached. '*Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*'

Thus 'light' is thrown on the subject of this meditation. A door is opened in heaven: a vail is withdrawn: a glance is permitted into the radiant abode of angelic and redeemed spirits: a white-robed throng stands before our eye, and the angel at the gate tells us 'who' they are, and 'whence' they came. 'These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have

* Beecher.

washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

Several particulars are recorded by the evangelist of this glorified assembly of redeemed ones.

Their *moral character*. They are 'washed' and made 'white.' They were not always what they now are. Their garments were once stained by sin, and their limbs covered with the dust, and their feet bleeding with the thorny pilgrimage of earth. They were the inhabitants of a world where all are sinners. This is the common and melancholy characteristic of earth. There is no exception to the law. No force of circumstances can alter it. It abides the same irrespective of birth, wealth, education, and age. 'All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.' No country, however serene the heavens, or balmy the air, or fertile the soil, or enchanting the landscapes, can claim exemption from this verdict.

'What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft on Ceylon's isle,
And every prospect pleases?
There only *man* is vile.'

'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.' The gospel provides a universal provision for a universal evil. There is 'a fountain opened for sin and for all uncleanness,' where the polluted are cleansed, and the guilty pardoned. Thousands and tens of thousands, from generation to generation, have gathered here to be

made clean, who are now gone before the throne of God, 'white' and 'faultless.' Some of them were anything but white and faultless when on earth, before the power of the gospel found them. They were among the chief of sinners: 'scarlet' sins and 'crimson' sins distinguished them. But they were arrested and saved through the ocean-fulness of His love who says, 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'

Herein, exclusively, is our title to heaven. To be where the redeemed are, we must first be made what they are—'washed' and made 'white,' 'not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.' No passport will avail at these city gates but that written in the 'blood of the Lamb.'

Their *position.* This springs out of their moral character: '*therefore* are they before the throne of God.' The position would be one of dread were it not for their having been qualified by 'the blood of the Lamb.' The throne of glory will be a throne of judgment to the wicked. 'The wicked shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.'

No fears possess the hearts of this bright company. Perfect confidence and love are there. Fear is cast out, for 'fear hath torment.' They are 'accepted in the beloved.' Absolute perfection marks their moral charac-

ter. What can never be found on earth is found in heaven—creatures that are '*faultless*.' The most eminent of the saints of God, in all ages, have proved themselves to be 'but men' under the pressure of temptation. But hereafter it shall be otherwise. The sun shall be without its spots; the crystal without its flaws; the rose without its thorns; the fruit without its taint; and the soul without its faults.

What dignity attaches to this position! 'before the throne.' It is accounted a privilege to catch a passing glimpse of a king; a greater to stand for a time in his presence; yet greater to be one of his attendants; greater still to be brought into his presence, and treated as a guest. But how does the honour attain its culmination when the intercourse is that of a child. Royalty belongs to every celestial inhabitant. Every head is crowned, and every form clothed in the 'court-dress'—'arrayed in white robes'—'kings and priests unto God.'

What high fellowship is here! 'He that sitteth on the throne shall *dwell* among them.' A royal father dwelling among His children!—smiling on them; talking with them; 'both hearing and answering them questions;' communicating wondrous knowledge; all clouds of error dispersed by the light of His mind; all mutual fellowships and sympathies regulated by the love of His heart. What light, love, joy, and peace must reign among the members of so glorified a family circle!

Their *occupation.* They 'serve him day and night in his temple.' Heaven is the region of rest, where no element exists to oppose the tidal flow of perfect peace and purity. From sin, care, and grief its inhabitants are free. As a child rests on the bosom of its mother, so do they rest in the conscious love of God, cradled in the 'everlasting arms' of a parent whose repose is never disturbed by one throb of care. In the sunshine of His face and the tranquillity of His presence they shall know no more 'tribulation.'

All this, however, is the rest of activity. God's heaven is like God's nature—it is the rest of ceaseless activity. Very erroneous conceptions of heaven are entertained by those who imagine it to be a place of passive enjoyments. Its bright population rest, and yet they 'rest not day nor night.' Inactivity is restlessness. Idleness is misery. Man's original state was associated with activity: he was made to work, and in his work to find his happiness.

'Rest is not quitting
The busy career;
Rest is the fitting
Of self to its sphere:
'Tis the brook's motion,
Clear without strife,
Fleeing to ocean
After its life.'

It is beyond human power fully to describe what heaven's activity will consist of. We know not to what

sublime vocations we shall be called in concert with angelic and redeemed societies. This much we do know: that the mind will be ever active in the acquisition of truth; and the heart in the growth of love; and every faculty and endowment in its progress 'from glory to glory.' By this intellectual and spiritual development, in concert with a resurrection body, we shall be fitted in a pre-eminent manner for the highest services in the temple of God. They who have lived in heaven long ages before us, may thus find their qualifications to become our instructors and guides when we join their fellowship; and we, in our turn, may likewise be the teachers of those whose entrance into glory will date long centuries after ours.

There is one service, unquestionably, that is to engage the energies of the glorified. It is 'the service of song.' The heart will be surcharged with gladness and adoration, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak the language of praise. 'After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and

honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.'

This service of song will be sustained and stimulated by high and hallowed *discourse*. Like the disciples, on their way to Emmaus, the glowing embers of gratitude and thanksgiving will 'burn within us' while we talk of Him who is the light and joy of the place—

> . . . 'talk with grateful tongue of storms and perils past,
> And praise the mighty Pilot that hath steered us through the rapids :
> He shall be the focus of it all, the very heart of gladness.'

And every breath that fans the vestal flame shall make the sacred fire burn more fervently, and the songs swell into loftier strains; and this shall be the burden of the song—'*Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*'

'*Who are these, and whence came they?*' Mothers of little children, answer the question! Look up through your tears and catch a glimpse of the fold of God, and see how safe and how happy are they whom ye call the lost lambs of your household flocks. They are not lost, but found—carried by the kind Shepherd in His arms, and folded to His bosom. How changed their aspect! The last you saw of them, after witnessing their infantile sufferings, was when you closed the coffin lid on their little withered forms. But see how bright and

beautiful they now appear!—flowers transplanted to God's garden, flowers of richest hue and sweetest fragrance, on which angels love to look as they keep them perpetual company. These are the fair white lilies of the paradise of God, made 'white in the blood of the Lamb.'

'They died, for Adam sinned:
They live, for Jesus died.'

'*Who are these, and whence came they?*' Parents of dear departed youth, the question is for you. Look up, and claim your glorified children! They are not dead, but live. Celestial emigrants are they, gone to colonize a brighter clime. You remember when you accompanied them to the mortal shore: you remember the languid eye, the sunken cheek, the worn and attenuated form, the slowly declining vigour of unfolding manhood and early womanhood; and then you said, 'Farewell.' '*Who are these?*'—these that shine so brightly, with the dew of immortal youth upon them! How radiant their looks! What rosy bloom sits on their countenances! What majestic strength girds their limbs! Can these be they? How sweet their songs! What dazzling beauty glances through their white robes! O ye disconsolate ones, look! and claim your honoured kindred. They are yours still—your children, having 'washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

'*Who are these, and whence came they?*' The question comes to the weeping widow; to the stricken husband; to the fatherless child; to the bereaved of all classes, of all ages, and in all relationships. These are the glorified forms of long-absent ones, lost to sight, but alive to faith—'not lost, but gone before.' They have changed the mortal for the immortal; earth for heaven; sighs for songs; tears for the undimmed vision of the face of God; weakness for strength; pain for pleasure; age for undecaying youth; and 'tribulation' for rest and triumph. '*They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*'

'Come away!
There are voices whispering all through the air;
And eyes that look out when the nights are most fair;
There are fingers beckoning us everywhere,—
Come away!

'Come away!
We are waiting, watching, hoping here;
And Hope—our angel—is partly Fear;
There are worlds where sorrow is never near,—
Come away!

'Who would stay?
Not the child of Hope who has felt Despair;
Not the heart that can utter one burning prayer
For light, for life, for purer air,—
Come away!

'Who would stay?
Not the soul which has known the fatal spell
Of syren Earth, and of cruel Hell;
Which has caught the chimes of that mighty Bell,—
Come away!

'Come away!
It swings in Eternity's secret place:
It rolls thro' the far-off realms of space;
It rings in each heart of the human race.
Come away!

'Come away!
Those thrilling voices! how far they roam!
O God! I answer that I would come;
Thro' the roughest paths would'st Thou lead me home.
Come away!

'Come away!
I am longing, waiting Thy command:
Mid the flood, the fire, if Thou take my hand,
I'll win my way to a quiet land;
Who would stay?'

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